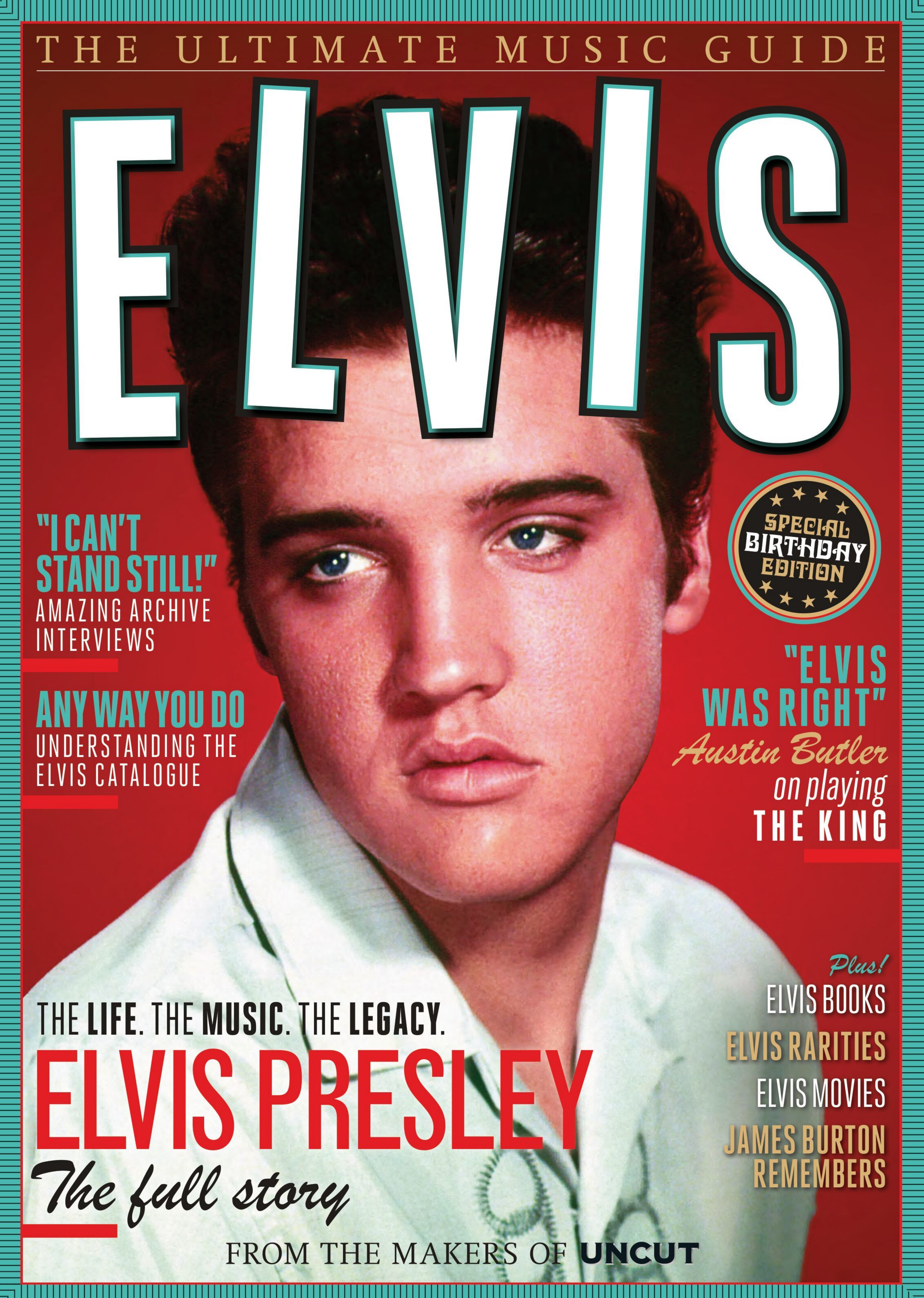
THE ULTIMATE MUSIC GUIDE

ELVIS



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"I CAN'T STAND STILL!"
AMAZING ARCHIVE INTERVIEWS

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UNDERSTANDING THE ELVIS CATALOGUE

"ELVIS WAS RIGHT"
Austin Butler on playing **THE KING**

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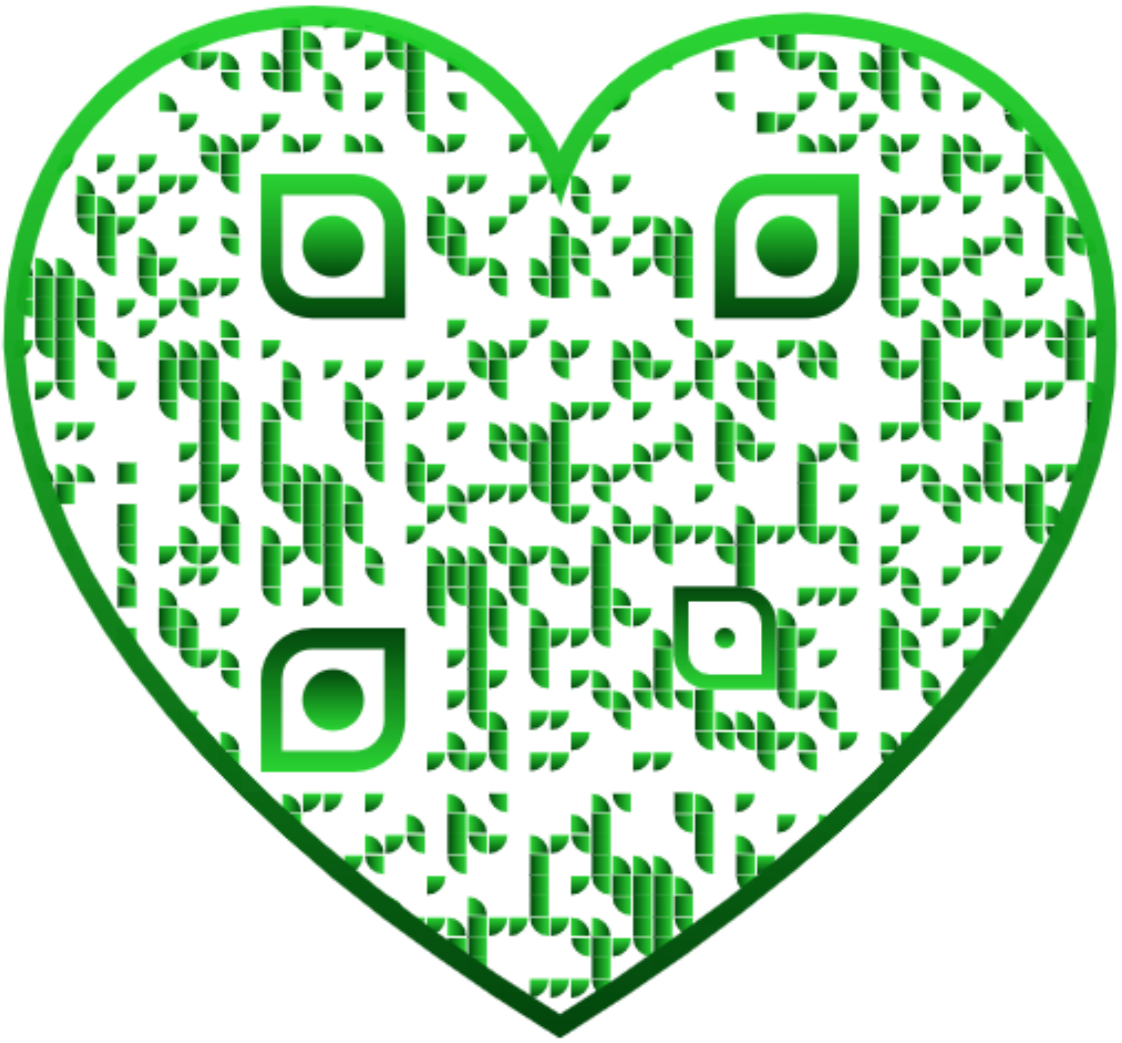

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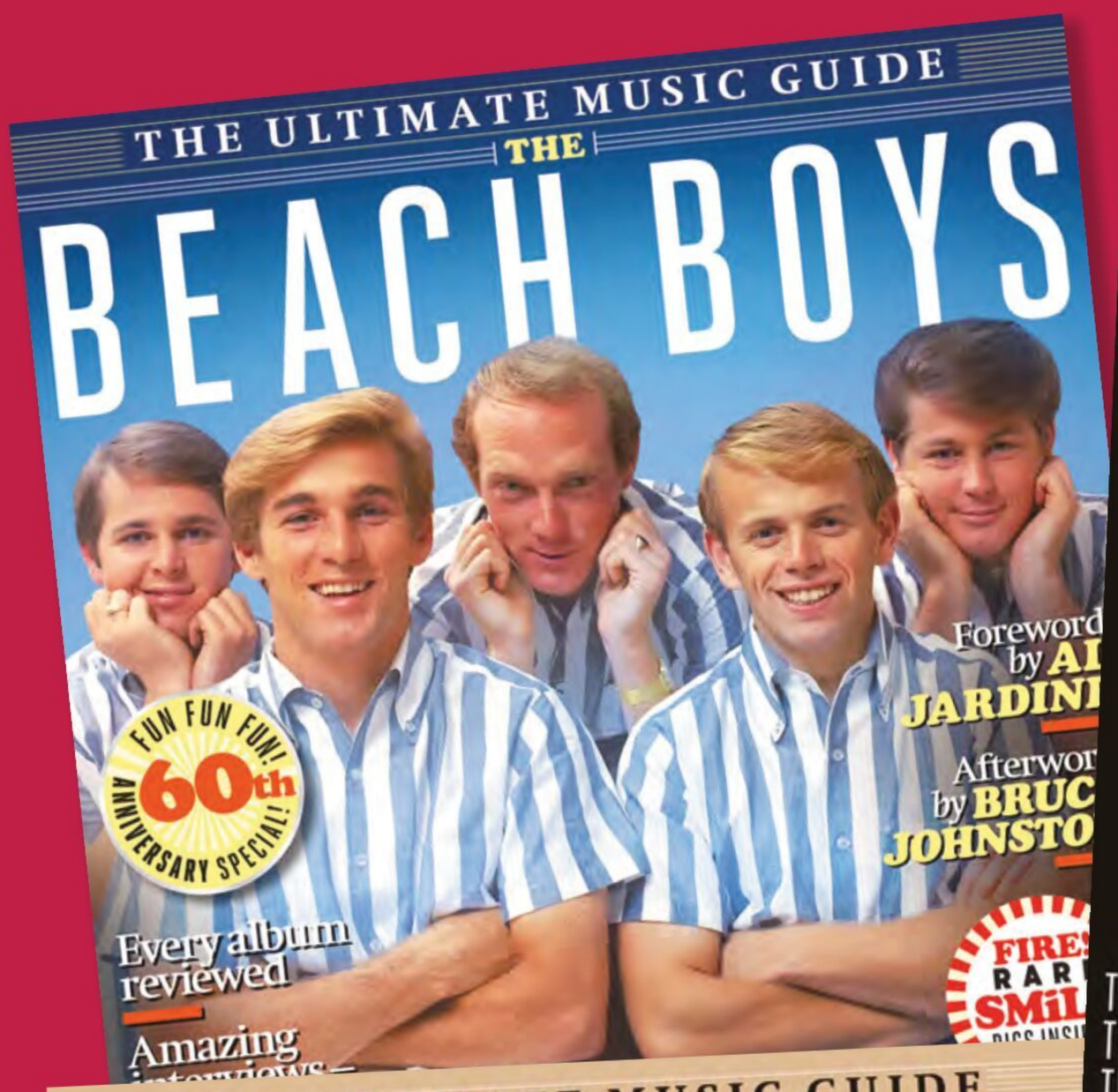

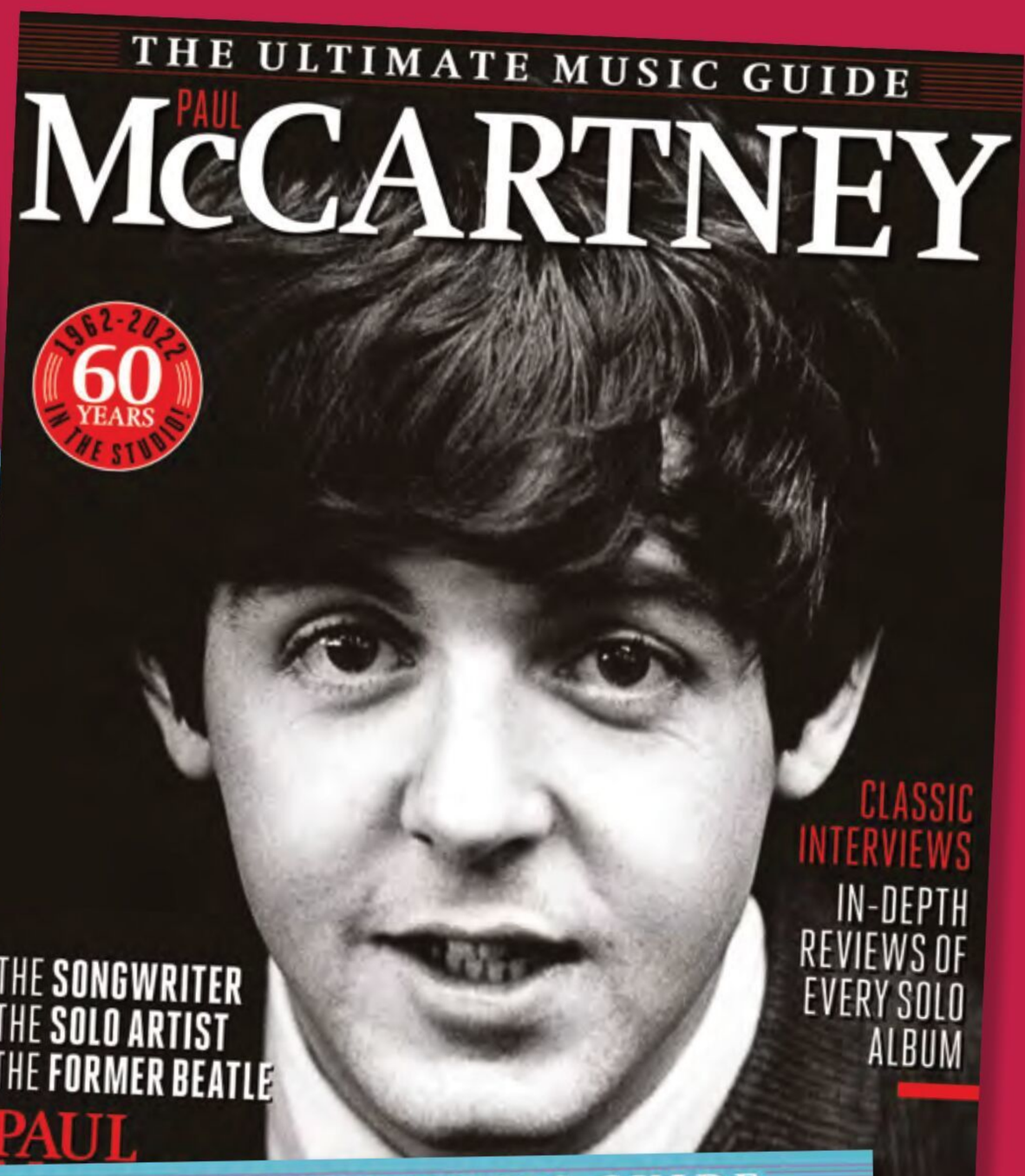

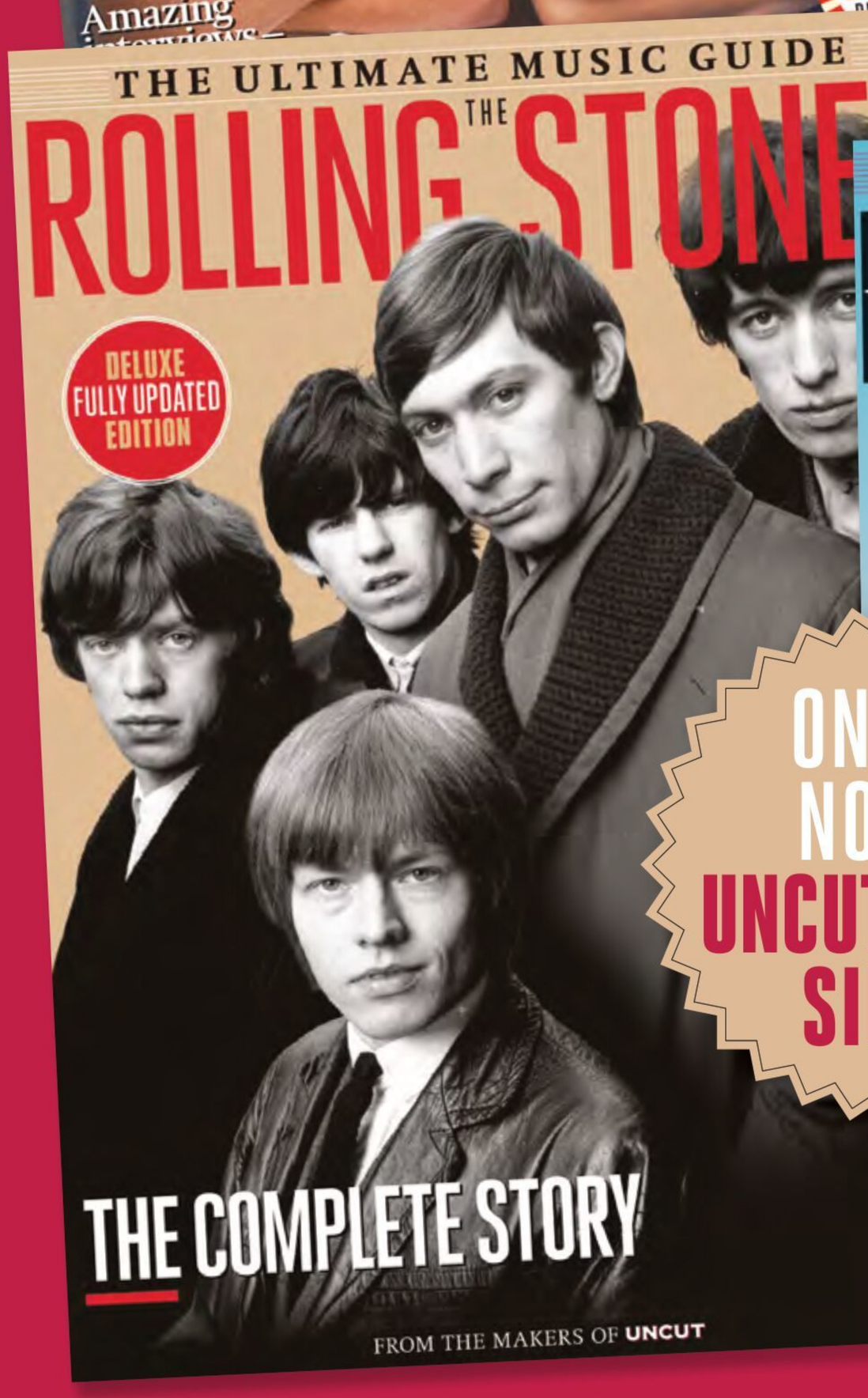

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NEW SINGER, NEW SOUND

Welcome to our definitive guide to the King's extraordinary career, from early gems to late classics

WHEN Elvis died in 1977 it was big news all round the world – with the notable exception of my primary school. During a morning assembly in the new school year, my headteacher addressed a hall of cross-legged children with the solemn news that a very famous singer had recently died. "Does anyone know who that was?" she asked. We, all only familiar with the recent TV news coverage about Elvis, thought the question was probably rhetorical. "That's right," she said. "I'm talking about Bing Crosby."

John Lennon famously said that before Elvis there was nothing, but that wasn't strictly the case. As you'll read in this latest *Ultimate Music Guide*, there was a previous generation of pop singers, and Bing – so beloved of my headteacher – was one who was routinely quizzed about Elvis's rise. What did he think? Would it last? Bing – not engaging with the rock revolution per se – observed that perhaps Elvis would do well to try some different styles of song. This ultimately proved to be wise counsel.

Bing wasn't the only one to help the writers of *NME* and *Melody Maker* register the impact of this new singer, and his new sound. Among the manufactured rivalries ("Elvis v Pat Boone"; "Elvis v Johnnie Ray" "No Presley without Haley") created at the time by a British press struggling for information in an enormous world, Johnnie Ray makes the wise observation that Elvis is a force helping to make the world smaller. Such is the demand for Elvis's music, Ray notes, his records are being released at the same time in the USA and England.

THE *NME* isn't slow to pick up on the fact that Elvis isn't just a singer, but a force which portends far more. He has "swarthy good looks" and "sex appeal", and it's this which gives him the power to unsettle parents. And in so doing, they imply, sow the seeds for something remarkable and generational to follow.

What comes next for Elvis, and for the world, you can read on the following pages, in a selection of gems from our archive of historic Elvis writing. We've also done what you might have thought impossible: make sense of Elvis's recordings, finding our way through a baffling profusion of budget compilations, indifferent film soundtracks and outtakes to bring you a definitive guide to the absolute pick of Elvis's extraordinary catalogue. The landmark early sessions. The religious ones. The decent film soundtracks. The comeback records and the late classics. You'll find it all inside.

Whether it's through the music,or a fantastic new film like Baz Luhrmann's current biopic, new people are always having their heads turned by Elvis. Hopefully we can help you navigate your way through his kingdom.

Enjoy the issue.

John Robinson, Editor

SHAWSHOTS / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

Elvis looking good in the '50s: sowing the seeds for a generation gap

ELVIS

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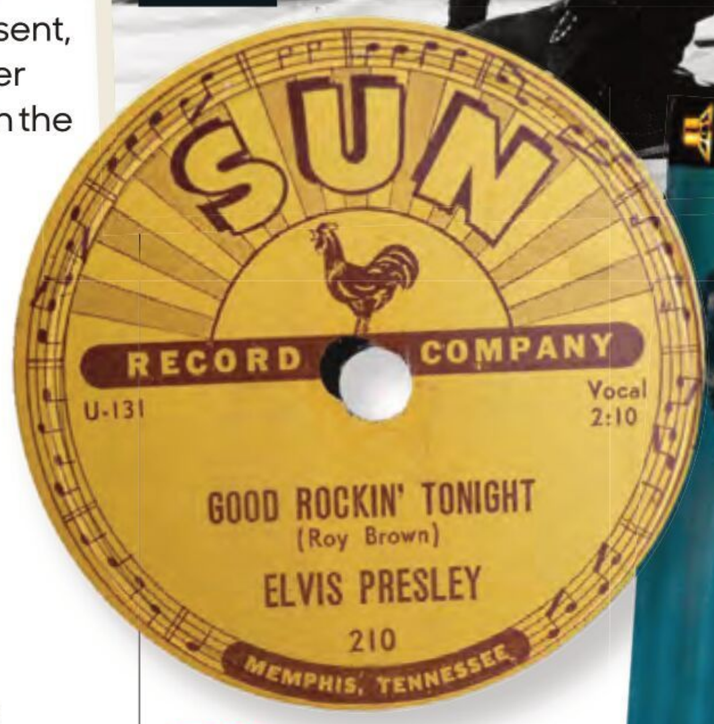
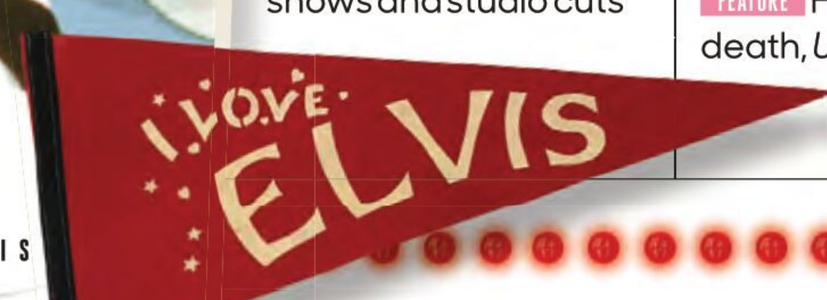


Announcing the *Aloha From Hawaii* show in Las Vegas, September 4, 1972

In Tampa, Florida, with his new Martin D-28 guitar, July 31, 1955



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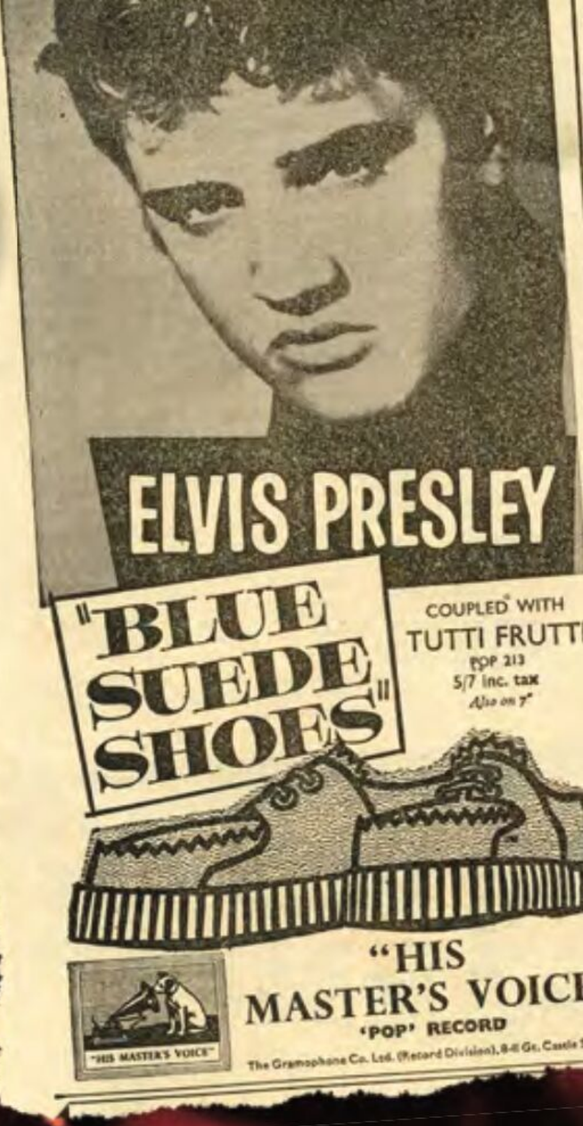

Stormy leather: adopting biker chic for the televised '68 Comeback Special

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Release Dates: MARCH 1975 | APRIL 1976

Record Label: RCA

THE SUN SESSIONS

Elvis has entered the building! The first, revolutionary, recordings.

BY **STEPHEN DEUSNER**

ELVIS PRESLEY was a pimple-faced, country-come-to-town teenager with blond hair and no sense of himself when he walked into Sun Studio in July 1954 – a far cry from the popular image of him from this era. He was quiet, reserved, nervous in this professional setting, and most of all deferential to Sam Phillips, who tried his damnedest to put the boy at ease.

About all Elvis had going for him, aside from a beautiful, robust voice he hadn't yet figured out how to use, was his determination to prove himself – and a surprisingly broad knowledge of popular song. With Phillips rolling tape and Marion Keisker standing by – she was Phillips' business partner and had convinced him to give the boy a chance – Elvis and his two-man band rambled through songs like Bing Crosby's 1950 hit "Harbor Lights" and Leon Payne's "I Love You Because", which were fine, lovely even, but hardly revelatory. Everyone was frustrated.

During a break in tracking, Elvis started goofing around with Arthur "Big Boy" Crudup's 1946 blues hit "That's All Right". There was no grand plan, no strategy; in fact, throughout his life he never could figure out why that song popped into his head at that moment. Guitarist Scotty Moore and upright bass player Bill Black joined in, everyone hamming it up. Phillips was intrigued and shouted for the kids to work up an arrangement. He told them to jettison every idea but the most essential: the firecracker guitar licks, the percussive bass slaps and Elvis's excitable, confident, even cocky vocal.

From that moment of collaboration sprung rock'n'roll as both a music and a market. Phillips had famously stated that he could make a million dollars if he could find a white kid who sounded convincingly black. "That's All Right" allowed him to market Elvis on black- and white-owned radio stations around the Bluff City and beyond, even at a time when miscegenation, musical or otherwise, was strictly forbidden in the Deep South. In retrospect, Phillips' strategy was opportunistic, reinforcing the music industry's exploitation of black labour and creativity that continues to this day. On the other hand, in November 1955 he did sell Presley's contract to RCA Records for what seems today a laughably small sum – a then-unthinkable $35,000.

Elvis, along with Black and Moore, invented something very different. "That's All Right" signalled a new combination of pop, hillbilly, blues, gospel, balladry and immigrant songs that not only sounded fresh but proclaimed a new attitude toward everything: sex, money, freedom, age, capitalism, religion. During the 16 months he was a Sun Records artist, Presley released five singles and cut many more unreleased tunes. Those songs would set the tone for rock'n'roll, kicking the world slightly off its axis. Did Elvis instigate this new world order? Or was he conjured by some cultural force already rolling through postwar America? Did Elvis invent rock'n'roll, or did rock'n'roll invent Elvis?

On his second A-side for Sun, a cover of Roy Brown's "Good Rockin' Tonight" recorded and released in September 1954, the newly minted rock star announces his own arrival: *"Have you heard the news? Everybody's rockin' tonight"*, he sings, as though speaking a coded language. Even more than "That's All Right", "Good Rockin' Tonight" divided listeners into two camps: the squares who didn't get it, and the kids who understood that word "rockin'" could mean so many things. Everybody's dancing and singing and partying and fucking tonight! Sex had long been the

CRITICS' VERDICTS

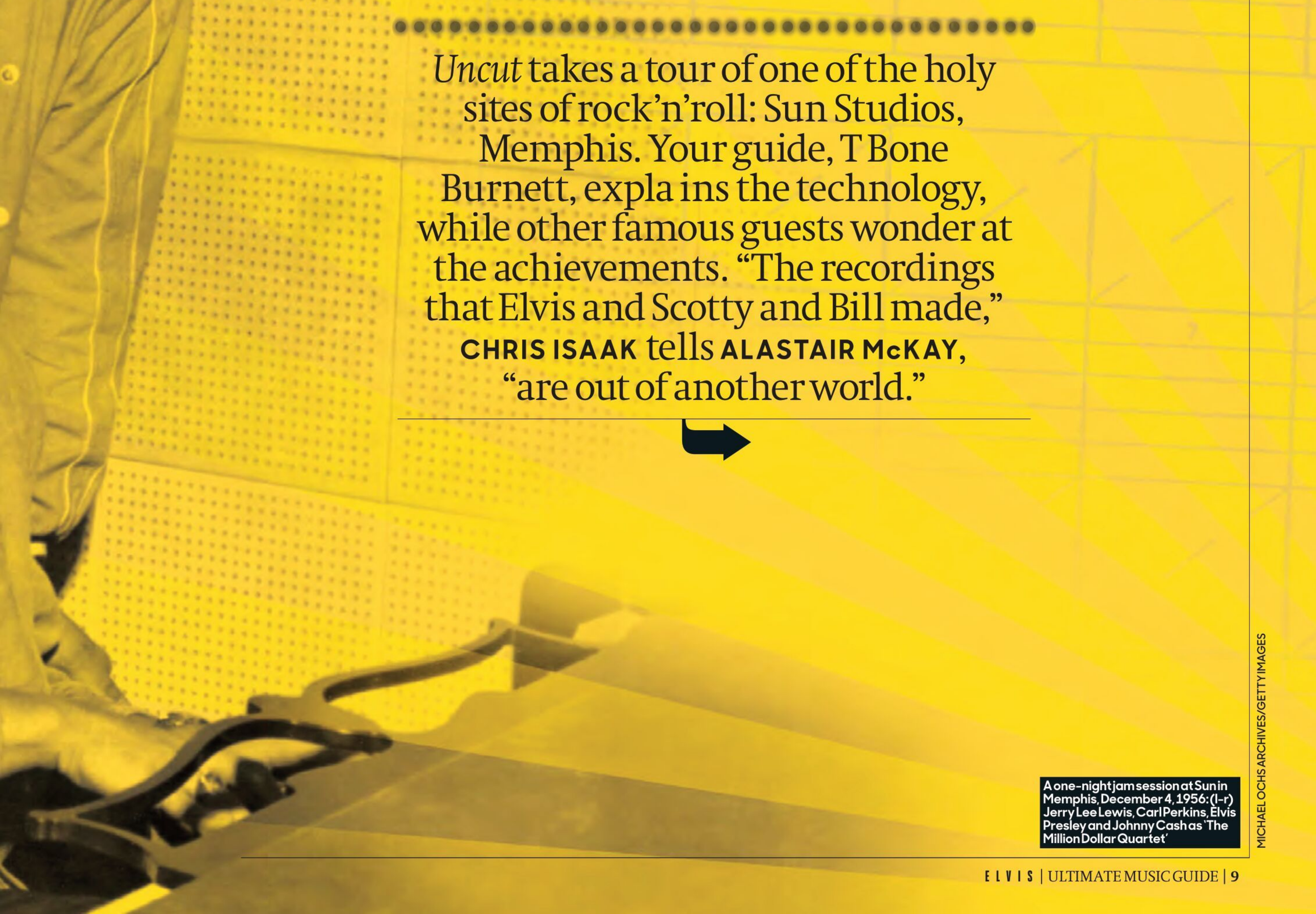
"I don't entirely agree with the theory that Elvis's Sun tracks represent his finest hours and that he's been going downhill at an accelerating pace ever since, but this album does contain some seminal music... It is the first time the Sun tracks have been gathered together on one record."
BOB WOFFINDEN, NME, 23/08/1975

ELVIS
THE SUN SESSIONS
RCA
ELVIS
THE SUN COLLECTION
RCA

★★★

“When Elvis came out, it changed everything”

Uncut takes a tour of one of the holy sites of rock’n’roll: Sun Studios, Memphis. Your guide, T Bone Burnett, expla ins the technology, while other famous guests wonder at the achievements. “The recordings that Elvis and Scotty and Bill made,” **CHRIS ISAAK** tells **ALASTAIR McKAY**, “are out of another world.”



A one-night jam session at Sun in Memphis, December 4, 1956: (l-r) Jerry Lee Lewis, Carl Perkins, Elvis Presley and Johnny Cash as ‘The Million Dollar Quartet’

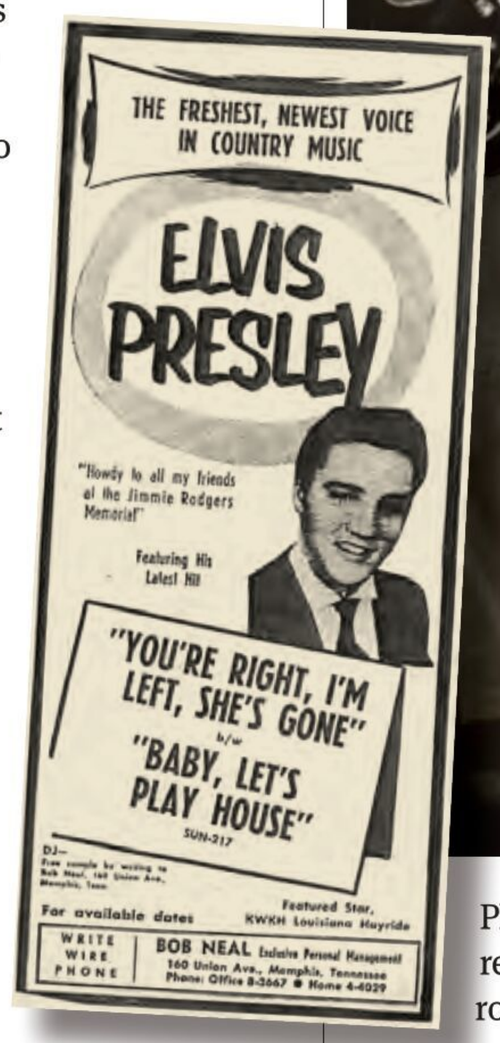
MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

Uncut | 11 | 2012

SUN STUDIO at 706 Union Avenue, Memphis, Tennessee, has many special qualities, some of which remain mysterious. It is possible to analyse them in terms of engineering, the way the sound bounces around the room. You might also consider history and coincidence, and the extraordinary array of talent it hosted, going back to when it opened in 1950 as Sam Phillips' Memphis Recording Service, although it has always been better known by the same name as the label Phillips went on to launch that operated from the same building, which Sam called Sun Records.

Between 1950 and 1960, the studio on Union Avenue was where the so-called Million Dollar Quartet of Elvis, Johnny Cash, Jerry Lee Lewis and Carl Perkins all recorded. Roy Orbison got his start there, as did Howlin' Wolf and Charlie Rich. Ike Turner may even have invented rock'n'roll within the walls of this fabled space.

But T Bone Burnett, whose affection for Sun and its sound is such that he plans to build a replica of the studio in Los Angeles, believes that Sun's success, what made it so unique, may also be a matter of geography; specifically, the meanderings of the Mississippi. "That river system is the lifeblood of the country," Burnett says. "Most things that come in and out of this country go up and down the Mississippi and through the river system. The river starts right where Bob Dylan was born, up in Minnesota, and it gets big by about St Paul, Minneapolis. I find it very interesting that Dylan was up at the top of it, and Louis Armstrong was down at the bottom in New Orleans. That is the axis, definitely, and Memphis was right in the middle."



THE first record on the Sun label was released in April 1952. Johnny London's "Drivin' Slow" had a rolling blues piano, and a haunting saxophone sound. It was recorded on March 1, 1952, and delivered on acetate to DJ Dewey Phillips on the same day. The 78rpm record was pressed on March 27, with a rooster label designed by a commercial artist on Beale Street.

As beginnings go, "Drivin' Slow" was decidedly low-key. But listen closely to the way the sax seems to exist in its own hollow space, and you may detect the first inkling of what has become known as the Sun sound.

Sam Phillips' studio was a no-frills affair, housed in a building first built as a bakery, and latterly used as a radiator repair shop. "I hadn't been to many studios, so my first impression was great," says Roland Janes, who played guitar in the Sun band, accompanying Jerry Lee Lewis, as well as being a member of Billy Lee Riley's Little Green Men. "I didn't know what a studio was supposed to look like, really. I thought it was a small building and I was amazed at the sound that we got out of it, but

"I don't sound like no-one": Elvis aged 19, with Scotty Moore and Bill Black during a weekly broadcast of *Lousiana Hayride* at the Shreveport Auditorium, October 16, 1954

TIMELINE — THE EARLY YEARS

Bankruptcy, the blues and BB King: how the Sun Record Company and Colonel Tom Parker turned the boy born in a Mississippi shotgun shack into the world's most valuable recording artist before his 21st birthday

1935-48

January 8, 1935
Elvis Aron Presley is born to Vernon and Gladys Presley in a two-room "shotgun shack" in Tupelo, Mississippi. His twin brother, Jessie Garon, is stillborn. Elvis is surrounded by a large and close-knit extended family.

1935-1948
Elvis attends Assembly Of God Church in Tupelo where a love of gospel music and spirituals grows. He also starts to listen to black bluesmen in the neighbourhood.

1945
Ten-year-old Elvis makes his first public performance, singing "Old Shep" in a youth talent contest at Tupelo's Mississippi-Alabama Fair And Dairy Show.

Let's play house: a two-year-old Elvis with parents Gladys and Vernon, Tupelo, Mississippi, 1937

1946
Elvis gets his first guitar. It costs $7.75 (plus sales tax) from the Tupelo Hardware Company. He'd

PICTURELUX / THE HOLLYWOOD ARCHIVE / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

THE SUN ALSO RISES

We pay tribute to the genius of Sam Phillips

BORN January 5, 1923, Sam Phillips was a DJ and radio engineer who honed his engineering skills recording orchestras at the Peabody Hotel in Memphis. After selling Sun to Shelby Singleton in 1969, he returned to the radio business. He died in 2003.

"He was a true visionary," says T Bone Burnett. "He was a civil rights leader. That's something he doesn't get credit for. He was anti- the oppressive Southern God. He was an inspirational leader. He had the first all-woman radio station in the country, WHER. He was fighting for equal rights for women, he was fighting for equal rights for African-Americans in the South. He was bringing in African-Americans. He always said: 'If I could find one of these white boys that could sing like a blues singer...' That's what he was looking for. But all through his life he said the most profound thing he ever did, was the Howlin' Wolf stuff."

"He just let us play," says Sonny Burgess. "I think that was his secret. Really, he didn't try and tell you: 'Well you ought to do it this way and that that way.' Sam didn't care, as long as it felt good. If it had that feeling, he knew he had something on his hands."

I didn't think anything but good thoughts.

"The first part of the building, there was a small office. You'd go through a door, directly into the studio, and you'd go through the studio up to the control room. So the entire building was not real big."

"The office in Sun, that's about 10 foot by 10 foot, and they had two or three desks, so you could get a crowd in there real quick," adds house drummer JM Van Eaton. "Most people hung out at Sun because it was the premier local label, plus it had a nice little restaurant right next door to it, Taylor's café. That's where the musicians would come and hang out, because Sun was so small. They'd sit around and drink coffee, talk about their gigs and write songs."

"Marshall Grant and Luther Perkins [*the Tennessee Two*] worked right across the street at a garage," explains rockabilly bandleader Sonny Burgess. "They'd walk over there to that café and eat lunch every day. Marshall told me: 'We didn't even know there was a studio there until [*Johnny*] Cash took us in there to record.'"

Commercially, Sun's breakthrough came in March 1953, with Rufus Thomas's "Bear Cat"; a novelty response to Big Mama Thornton's "Hound Dog".

"It was mainly blues bands at first," says musician and Memphis cultural historian Tav Falco. "They didn't have the term rock'n'roll at the time. They had rhythm and blues, but that encompassed jump blues, jazz blues, R&B sounding bands. Ike Turner was pretty important. Who knows what Sam would have recorded without Ike? Who knows if those people would have come in like they did?"

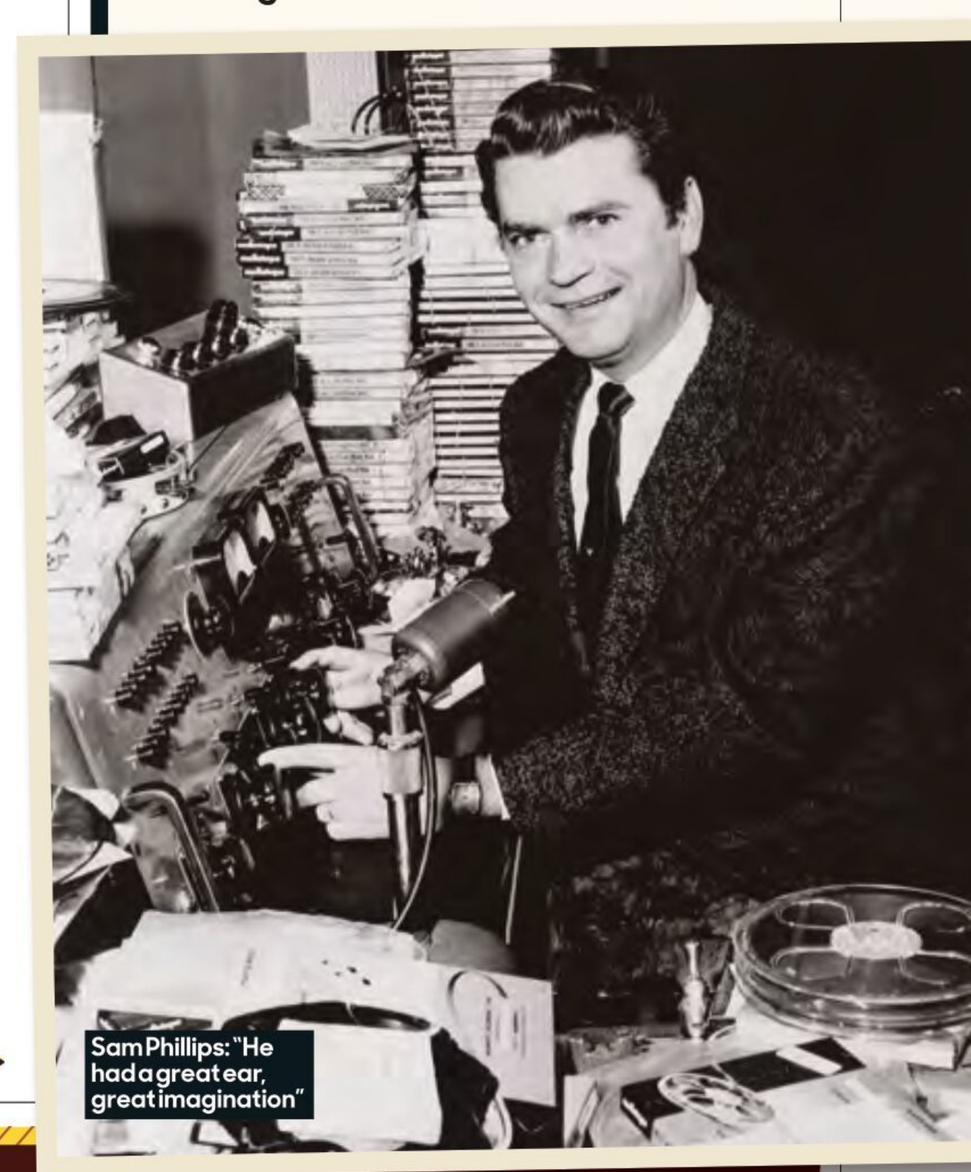
Ike Turner had showed up on March 3, 1951 to record the supercharged "Rocket 88", with singer Jackie Brenston. To some, the distorted guitar on the record marked the birth of rock'n'roll. But in those early, pre-Sun years, Phillips also made some extraordinary blues recordings. "The first major breakthrough Sam made was with Howlin' Wolf," argues T Bone Burnett. "That's when he started bringing the bass and drums up loud. Back in those days the bass and drums were background instruments; it was all about the horns and the piano, the melody instruments, and Sam brought the rhythm section right up front, and that became rock'n'roll. That was a big shift.

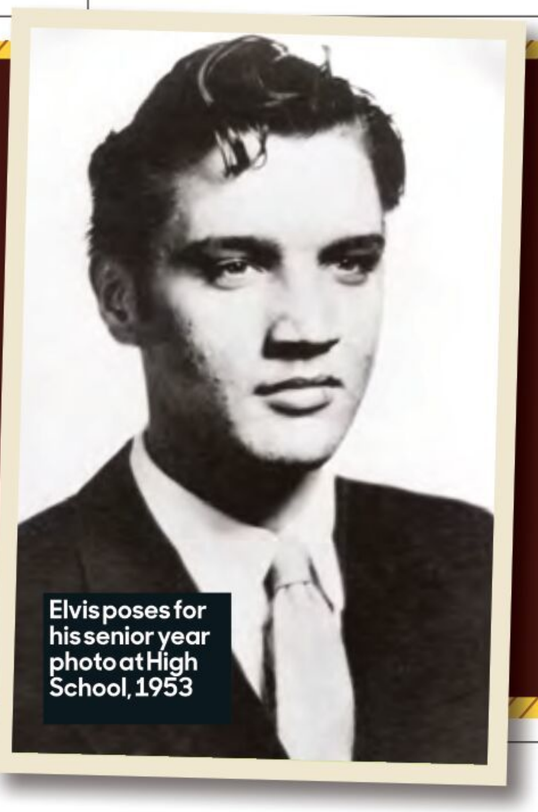
"In some ways 'How Many More Years' by Wolf would be the first rock'n'roll song because that has the guitar lick that became the central guitar lick in rock'n'roll, and that's the first time we heard that played on a distorted guitar. It was an old big band lick, turned into something completely fresh."

But Sun's reputation rests largely on what happened when Phillips managed to fuse hillbilly music with the energy of rhythm and blues. Famously, Phillips's grand ambition was to find a white singer who could replicate the energy found in black R&B. That singer was Elvis Presley, who also added a dash of gospel.

> **"I DIDN'T KNOW HOW A STUDIO WAS MEANT TO SOUND. I WAS AMAZED AT THE SOUND WE GOT"**
> *Roland Janes, Sun band*

The 18-year-old Presley first entered the studio in July 1953, to record two songs - "My Happiness" and "That's When Your Heartaches Began". "You could pay a few dollars and they let you cut two acetate dubs, one song on each side," recalls Van Eaton. "The first time I went in there, Sam was doing the engineering."


Sam Phillips: "He had a great ear, great imagination"


Elvis poses for his senior year photo at High School, 1953

wanted a bike but the family couldn't afford it.

1948
Elvis plays his guitar and sings "Leaf On A Tree" for his Milam Junior High class in Tupelo at a farewell concert. Elvis and his parents pack all their possessions in a trunk, strap it to the roof of their old car and head to Memphis, Tennessee in search of a better life.

1948-'53
The Presley family live in a succession of poor neighbourhoods in north Memphis. Life continues to be hard. Elvis works at various jobs to help support himself and his parents while attending LC Humes High School. He's making a name for himself as a singer and guitar player among his community. He hangs around Beale Street blues clubs where he bumps into bluesmen like BB King. He is also a regular at the all-night gospel "sings" that are held downtown. He wears his hair comparatively long and slick, and lets his sideburns grow. He's starting to stand out and is dropped from the school football team for refusing to cut his ducktail. In 1950, he plays in the annual Christmas talent show at his school and is so popular that he gets to perform an encore.

June 1953
Elvis graduates from Humes High School. As soon as he leaves school, Elvis starts a job at Parker Machinists Shop.

COLIN ESCOTT/MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

Media scrum: Elvis with (l-r) UPI Memphis bureau chief Leo Soroka, Sam Phillips and Memphis Press-Scimitar journalist Bob Johnson on the day of the 'Million Dollar Quartet' recordings at Sun Studios, December 4, 1956

Phillips wasn't present on July 18, 1953, when Presley first visited, but the singer made enough of an impression on his assistant Marion Keisker for their brief conversation to become part of Elvis lore. "Who do you sound like?" Keisker asked. More out of humility than boastfulness, Presley replied: "I don't sound like nobody." The truth of this statement was evident when Phillips finally got around to recording Elvis, along with guitarist Scotty Moore and bassist Bill Black. Their version of "Blue Moon", says Burnett, "is psychedelic for sure. Elvis was being Bing Crosby, right? And The Inkspots. He was synthesising all this stuff."

"The recordings that Elvis and Scotty and Bill made are out of another world," says Chris Isaak, whose album *Beyond The Sun* was recorded at 706 Union. "That voice and that echo and that guitar... and Bill Black: even his bass doesn't sound like it's a bass. It's like a click and a clack, like some guy walking in the background. It's an otherworldly sound. Carl Perkins told me, he could listen to a record and if it was cut at Sun, he could hear the room.

"Sam Phillips was Thomas Edison with music. He was light years ahead of the rest of us."

> "SAM PHILLIPS WAS THOMAS EDISON WITH MUSIC. HE WAS LIGHT YEARS AHEAD"
> *Chris Isaak*

Presley's first single, "That's All Right", was issued on July 19, 1954. JM Van Eaton is in no doubt about the importance of the moment. "When Elvis came out," he says, "man, it changed everything."

CERTAINLY, after Elvis, it became possible to talk of a Sun sound. Presley's Sun recordings – around 20 songs in just over a year – crystallised a musical revolution. It started with the untutored energy of rockabilly, and matured into rock'n'roll. "What was going on at Sun records was outside of the mainstream," says Falco. "Nobody was touching this stuff with a 30-foot pole except for race records and blues labels. Sam said: 'People didn't know what to

TIMELINE THE EARLY YEARS

July
18 Elvis stops in at 706 Union Avenue, the home of the Sam Phillips Memphis Recording Service (Sun Record Company), and records two songs "My Happiness" and "That's When Your Heartaches Begin". He wants an acetate pressed as a belated birthday present for his mother. Phillips isn't in, so his office manager Marion Keisker handles the $4 session. She is intrigued by the young man's voice, makes a copy of the session for her boss and writes "good ballad singer" on the box.

Late 1953
Elvis switches jobs, moving to Crown Electric Company where he drives a van. He also attends night school where he studies to be an electrician.

1954

January
4 Elvis drops in to Sun to record another acetate. Keisker makes her boss listen.

July
5 Phillips gets Elvis back into the studio to record with local players Scotty Moore (guitar) and Bill Black (bass). After an unproductive session, Elvis breaks into a sped-up version of Arthur 'Big Boy' Crudup's "That's

MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

DELTA CATS, HOWLIN' WOLVES AND BLUE SUEDE SHOES...

10 classics singles recorded at Sun

JACKIE BRENSTON AND HIS DELTA CATS – ROCKET 88

Recorded by Phillips in March, 1951 (and released on Chess Records), this joyous tribute to a new model Oldsmobile was assembled by Ike Turner's band. Notable for Willie Kizart's distorted guitar sound caused – myth has it – by damage to the amplifier, when it fell onto Highway 61 while the band drove from Clarksdale, Mississippi to Memphis. Turner suggested the amp was rain-damaged and also stuffed with newspapers.

HOWLIN' WOLF
HOW MANY MORE YEARS

Although licensed to Chess, Wolf's fierce, distorted blues riff – setting the template for rock'n'roll – was recorded at Sun on May 14, 1951. "What started me recording..." Wolf told Peter Guralnick, "Ike Turner carried me over to Memphis to Sam Phillips." On hearing Wolf, Sam Phillips reportedly said: "This is where the soul of man never dies."

ELVIS PRESLEY
THAT'S ALL RIGHT

Presley's version of the Arthur 'Big Boy' Crudup song was recorded on July 3, 1954, after Elvis, Scotty Moore and Bill Black started fooling around during a break in a recording session. On release, the record was aired 14 times on WHBQ radio by DJ Dewey Phillips, launching Presley's career.

CARL PERKINS
BLUE SUEDE SHOES

Recorded on December 19, 1955, two days after Perkins wrote it. He was on his way to play it on Perry Como's television show when his Chrysler Imperial smashed into a pick-up truck. "I was 85 miles away from being the first rockabilly on national television," he recalled. Instead, from his hospital bed, he had to look on as Elvis made the song his own.

Platter that mattered: Phillips with Carl Perkins, celebrating a million sales of "Blue Suede Shoes" in 1956

ROY ORBISON
OOBY DOOBY

Originally recorded for Je-Wel Records, in Norman Petty's studio in Clovis, New Mexico, then re-made at Sun on March 27, 1956, this was Sun's biggest seller of the rockabilly era, shifting almost half a million copies. But Orbison was already bored; the strictures of rockabilly were a limitation for a singer who had to leave Sun Records to explore his interest in operatic pop.

JOHNNY CASH
I WALK THE LINE

Recorded on March 30, 1956, Cash's first No 1 was written as a promise to his first wife, Vivian, and sped up at the urging of Sam Phillips. Jack Clement, who worked with Cash, recalls: "I wasn't too impressed with Cash at first, as I like recordings with class... And Cash seemed too rough, but 'I Walk The Line', with the humming, was a class recording."

SONNY BURGESS
WE WANNA BOOGIE

Inspired by visits to Arkansas by Elvis, Scotty and Bill, Burgess re-oriented his band, the Pacers, from playing R'n'B and country to rock'n'roll. His first single for Sun, recorded in 1956, was wild, with an extraordinary guitar break. At times

it was out of tune, but Phillips released it anyway, because it had the untamed spirit he was seeking.

BILLY LEE RILEY
FLYING SAUCERS ROCK'N'ROLL

Released in January 1957, with Jerry Lee Lewis on piano, written by Jack Scott to cash in on the UFO craze, this fierce slice of rockabilly established Riley as one of Sun's many nearly men. His band, including Roland Janes and JM Van Eaton, were named The Little Green Men, and wore green suits, which leaked dye when they sweated.

JERRY LEE LEWIS
GREAT BALLS OF FIRE

Recorded on October 8, 1957, but only after a heated debate between Lewis and Sam Phillips about whether Otis Blackwell and Jack Hammer's song, with its innuendo-laden twist on Pentecostal imagery, was blasphemous.

CHARLIE RICH
LONELY WEEKENDS

The final recording at 706 Union Avenue, October 14, 1959, Rich's jaunty shuffle was completed at the new Sam Phillips Recording Service, with blatant exploitation of the new studio's echo facilities. An occasional session man at Sun, Rich was squeezed into a Jerry Lee Lewis-shaped box, before excelling at white R&B, and later becoming an easy listening superstar aka The Silver Fox.

COLIN ESCOTT/MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES; MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

All Right". This song, backed with "Blue Moon Of Kentucky", becomes the first of five singles Elvis will release on the Sun label.

Summer
Elvis, Scotty and Bill start performing together, with Scotty acting as the group's manager. Elvis continues to work at Crown Electric as the group starts to play small clubs and other smalltime gigs throughout the South, enjoying moderate success.

October
2 Elvis's only appearance on The Grand Ole Opry doesn't go down well. One Opry official tells him to go back to driving a truck, criticism he takes hard.

October
16 Elvis and band appear for the first time on *The Louisiana Hayride*, a live Saturday night country radio show. It's the main rival to the Opry, carried by 190 stations. He signs a deal for 52 appearances. It's here he meets promoter and future manager Colonel Tom Parker.

1955

January
Elvis signs with Bob Neal, who becomes his manager.

Spring
Drummer DJ Fontana joins Elvis's band. Presley starts to become a phenomenon in the South where his live shows are electrifying audiences.

August
15 Elvis signs a one-year contract with Colonel Parker.

November
20 Sam Phillips sells Elvis's contract, plus the rights to his first five singles, to RCA for a then-record $35,000 (plus an extra $5,000 for Elvis himself).

Red alert: live in Cleveland Ohio, October 20, 1955

Great balls of blasphemy: Phillips with Jerry Lee Lewis, Sun Studio, 1957

MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

call this music, they didn't know whether it was fish or fowl.'"

It's tempting to imagine that Phillips was lucky enough to be in the right place at the right time. But such an analysis ignores the technical brilliance of his work.

"Sam looks like a lucky hillbilly who started a little studio and all this talent was just here, and all he did was turn the lights on," says Sun's former engineer, Matt Ross-Spang. "But Sam had his electrical engineering licence, and that's a tough test. He came into this room, he put in a hardwood floor and he designed the tile for certain frequencies. That's not hit or miss – acoustics is one of the hardest things in the world. He always talked about how he had this sound in his head that no-one else was recording."

"His greatest gift was in being able to spot unusual talent and get the most out of them," says Janes. "He was a great engineer. He had a great ear, a great imagination. He was smart enough to let people do what they did best and then he kind of loaded it."

"When we were in that studio, playing that first session, Sam was our audience," says Burgess. "Only one person – it didn't matter, as long as somebody wanted to hear us play. So we were playing like we were in front of a huge crowd. That's why it's so wild."

"He didn't have a lot of equipment," says Janes, "but he put it together wisely and he was one of the first people that I knew of that used slapback echo. He had three tape recorders in the control room. He had one, the main recorder that he cut the sound on, and he had another one that he used to transfer tapes from. Then he had a third machine that was rack-mounted. He fed a portion of the signal, as it came into the room, into that machine, then he played that back through the board, and added it to the original recording machine; by increasing or decreasing the volume, he was able to get, and control, the slapback echo."

Phillips was also a master of microphone placement. "Even during a session," Janes continues, "he might move the microphone further or closer, but once he got it to where it was sounding good to him he left it alone. He came up with a brilliant thing with Johnny Cash – he took thin paper, and put it over one string and under the next one, over the next string, under the next one, on his guitar, and then he had that little bit of slapback on that, and that's how he got that boom-chicka sound, along with Luther's guitar playing to have sort of a snare drum sound. They were recording with just three instruments. He got a big sound."

For all that rock'n'roll was decried as the devil's work, there was a spiritual side to the revolution which took place at Sun. "Gospel and rock'n'roll were cut from the same cloth," says Falco, "even though one is considered by some the devil's

THE SUN ALSO RISES

The studio's next steps...

IN 1960, Phillips moved out of 706 Union, and built a new state-of-the-art studio a few blocks from Sun. The Sam C Phillips Recording Studio recorded a number of bands inspired by Sun, including Tav Falco's Panther Burns (featuring Alex Chilton) and The Cramps. Some continuity with Sun is provided by Roland Janes, who works in the newer studio. "Both are great studios," he explains. "This one here can handle bigger bands, and more people, and has more modern equipment. At the old studio, you'd walk in the door and there you were. The new studio has receptionists and all that – and we weren't used to that. But it's great."

Sun was revived in 1986, for the *Class Of '55* album, produced by Chips Moman, using a recording console parked outside. It reopened as a studio (and tourist attraction) in 1987, and hosted U2 for some of the *Rattle And Hum* sessions (right). Former Sun engineer Matt Ross-Spang has since restored the studio facilities with vintage equipment.

The man comes around: Sam Phillips poses for a portrait with Johnny Cash with a framed record for sales of "I Walk The Line", 1956

"THERE WAS A SPIRITUAL SIDE TO THE REVOLUTION TAKING PLACE AT SUN"

JM Van Eaton

music, and the other sanctified music. It was played by the same people, and appealed to the same audience."

Sun even pitched to the same marketplace. Sam's brother Jud Phillips – who pioneered record promotion – was a former gospel performer, and he hawked the records to the DJs he knew in Arkansas, Mississippi, Louisiana and Tennessee.

"It gets to a point where musically it's not so easy to distinguish," says Falco. "The lyrics, yeah, and the content, but if you listen to Roebuck Staples playing the guitar in sanctified music, you hear hill-country blues coming out of the guitar."

If this conflict could be located in the body of one individual, that person was Jerry Lee Lewis. JM Van Eaton recalls his first meeting with the piano player from Ferriday, Louisiana. "He had a goatee, and JW, his uncle, was with him, and he had his arm in a cast. I'm thinking, 'Man, they called me in to do this with this crazy-looking piano player and a guy with his arm in a cast trying to make music? This is strange.' But Jerry Lee was awesome. He could make any record his own."

Lewis's ability to synthesise faith and devilment in the same phrase was evident in the ferocity of his recordings, which were delivered with the passion of a hellfire preacher. And it wasn't an act. As luck would have it, the tapes were rolling in 1957 when Phillips tried to coax Jerry Lee into recording "Great Balls Of Fire". What ensued was a furious spat, in which Lewis wrestled with the notion of sin, and Phillips tried to counter with the suggestion that a rock'n'roll singer might, in some way, be able to save souls.

"I thought it was funny because I could see both of them," says Van Eaton. "Sam's as serious as he could be, and Jerry's as heated as he could be."

"It's an argument that went on for almost 50 years," says Burnett. "I think it's finally been resolved: music is a good thing, it doesn't need any particular name put on it to make it good; like writing 'Jesus' on a flower doesn't make it more beautiful."

"I think Sun was a God thing," concludes Van Eaton. "Certain things happen in life, and that was one of them. Sam Phillips being there and opening that studio at the right time, and the people came to him. It wasn't like a record producer going to a venue and saying 'Hey, I'd like to sign that band.' These people came knocking on his door. How strange is that, that you've got Elvis Presley, Johnny Cash, Roy Orbison, Jerry Lee Lewis, Charlie Rich, Billy Riley – all of these guys coming in asking you to make records on them? That's phenomenal. There is something more to it – that just doesn't happen every day. To me, that's amazing."

COLIN ESCOTT/MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

Release Dates:	MARCH 13, 1956	OCTOBER 19, 1956	Record Label:	RCA VICTOR

ELVIS PRESLEY /ELVIS

Elvis joins RCA for $35,000 — and is quickly put to work. An eclectic programme finds the singer transcending genre. | BY NIGEL WILLIAMSON

THE name of Steve Sholes may be less celebrated than those of Sam Phillips and Colonel Tom Parker, yet his role in the making of Elvis Presley was in many ways every bit as significant.

Sholes (1911–1968) was the head of RCA's country division when he first saw Presley sing at a convention for disc jockeys in Nashville in 1955. At the time Presley had released a handful of singles on Sun which had scraped the lower reaches of the country chart, but the excitement he generated on stage had not crossed over to mainstream commercial success.

Impressed by "the novelty of his vocal style and the electrifying effect he had on the audience", Sholes bought out Presley's contract for $35,000 in a deal which gave RCA the rights to all his Sun material and threw in a new Cadillac for the singer as a sweetener. At 20, Elvis was still a minor and so his father Vernon signed the contract on his behalf.

His new label rushed him into the studo in January 1956 to record "Heartbreak Hotel". Sholes produced and reported that he had great trouble getting Presley to keep still and sing directly into the microphone. In the end he painted an 'X' on the studio floor and ordered Presley to stand on it.

As "Heartbreak Hotel" climbed towards No 1, RCA needed an album. With Elvis out on the road, Sholes trawled the unreleased Sun material he had inherited and the handful of tracks recorded at his first RCA sessions that January.

Received wisdom holds that Elvis's Sun recordings represent the pure essence of rock'n'roll and RCA then 'tamed' him. Presley's debut album, released on RCA in March 1956 with the first great cover of the rock'n'roll era, suggests that the reality was considerably more complicated. Assembled by Sholes from both Sun and RCA sessions, the first thing one notices is the relative weakness of the previously unreleased Sun tracks. Recorded at various sessions in 1954 and 1955, they're country songs; the RCA material draws more overtly on rock'n'roll and R'n'B sources, including covers of hits by Little Richard, Ray Charles, Carl Perkins and The Drifters.

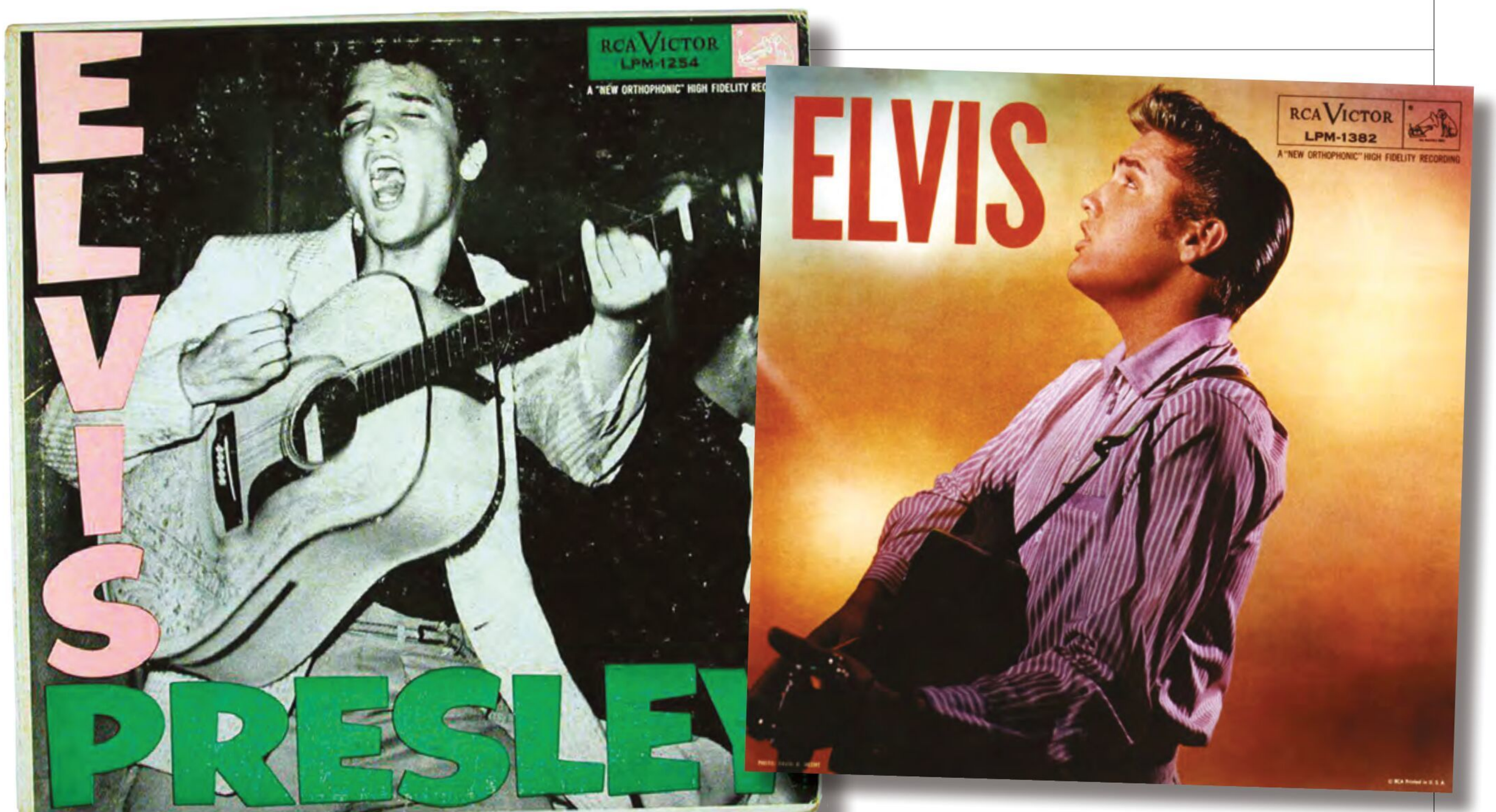
Among the Sun tracks is "I Love You Because", from Presley's first session in July 1954 at which he recorded his debut single "That's All Right". Written by Leon Payne in 1949 and later covered by Johnny Cash and Jim Reeves, Presley's version is sentimental, even corny with its whistled intro, and his singing immature. The Hawaiian-tinged "I'll Never Let You Go (Little Darlin')" from September 1954 is simply awful. Fortunately "Just Because", recorded at the same session, is terrific, even though (or perhaps because) its arrangement is a blatant copy of "That's All Right". The best of the Sun tracks is "Tryin' To Get To You", a bluesy, rockabilly romp with Elvis letting rip and a thrilling Scotty Moore guitar break, recorded in July 1955, five months before he signed for RCA.

RCA was quite happy to sell Presley to a country audience but the main reason they had bought out his contract was to exploit the youthful rock'n'roll market, and so Sholes set about assembling a hybrid album that could simultaneously invade the country, R&B and pop charts. This involved balancing the Sun tracks with the harder-edged rockers recorded during the first RCA sessions at which "Heartbreak Hotel" had been nailed. The hit was omitted from the album, but some of the other recordings from those January 1956 sessions are among the hardest-rocking tracks Presley ever recorded.

CRITICS' VERDICTS

ELVIS PRESLEY
"His vibrant attack, and his great vocal range, enable him to tac kle the widely varied repertoire contained in the 12 titles of this exciting disc."
DOUG GEDDES, NME, 19/10/1956

ELVIS
"One of the more puzzling aspects about Presley's success is that a good percentage of the lyrics he sings are unintelligible..."
LAURIE HENSHAW, MM, 01/06/1957



"Blue Suede Shoes" is invested with an urgency that Perkins' original version could only hint at, Little Richard is given a run for his money on a feral "Tutti Frutti". Elvis can't quite match the sly wit The Drifters injected into "Money Honey", but he barrels through the song with an irresistible enthusiasm. Less successful is his rockabilly take on Ray Charles' "I Got A Woman", but even here he avoids emasculating the song in the style of so many white singers covering black R&B hits.

The subsequent UK version of the album released as *Elvis Presley Rock 'n' Roll* is actually a superior release, replacing the weaker Sun material with "That's All Right", "Mystery Train" and "I'm Left, You're Right, She's Gone" and adding Presley's rather good covers of Lloyd Price's "Lawdy, Miss Clawdy" and Big Joe Turner's "Shake, Rattle And Roll".

BY the time his second LP, *Elvis*, was released seven months later, "Heartbreak Hotel" had been followed to No 1 by "Don't Be Cruel", "Hound Dog" and "Love Me Tender" – although again none of them featured on the album. Instead, all but one of the dozen tracks were recorded in a purposeful three-day session at the beginning of September, six weeks before the album was released.

Backed by his touring band of Scotty Moore, Bill Black and DJ Fontana along with the sweet harmonies of The Jordanaires, it's a more a coherent album than its predecessor, even though it's only 30 minutes long and the material jumps all over the shop from country ("When My Blue Moon Turns To Gold Again") to blues ("So Glad You're Mine") and from ballads to visceral rock'n'roll.

Several of the songs were specifically commissioned for the album, including Otis Blackwell's terrific R'n'B vamp "Paralyzed" and the doo-wop styled "Love Me" from Leiber and Stoller, looking to repeat their triumph with "Hound Dog". The inclusion of three Little Richard covers, all apparently at Presley's insistence, seems overload, but they're pretty great anyway. Only an over-mannered "How Do You Think I Feel" and a hackneyed "Old Shep" – which Presley won a prize for singing at a Tupelo fair when he was 10 – miss the mark.

What unifies the diverse material is the striking self-confidence and mastery of Presley's singing. In a few short months he had already started to move beyond his country roots and his billing as the new rock'n'roll sensation and was on his way, transcending genres, to becoming the consummate voice.

★★★

“I can’t sing if I stand still”

Just who is Elvis Presley? Excited reports begin to filter back to the United Kingdom in spring 1956 about a controversial singer with “sex appeal”. The Johnnie Ray fans aren’t convinced but movie studios are calling and his new record “Love Me Tender” has gone gold before it’s even in the shops.
“I can’t believe it’s not a dream,” Elvis tells **NME**. “And, if it is, I hope I never wake up.”

BETTMANN/GETTYIMAGESA

The revolution will be televised: Performing "Hound Dog" on *The Milton Berle Show*, L.A. June 5, 1956

Frame at last: Elvis shows off a gold record for "Heartbreak Hotel" to (l-r) DJ Fontana, Bill Black and Scotty Moore, 1956

DON CRAVENS/GETTY IMAGES

A SINGLE NOTE ON HIS GUITAR CAN PRODUCE HOWLS OF ADMIRATION, A SONG CAN TURN THEM INTO A SCREAMING, ALMOST HYSTERICAL CROWD!

FROM out of the blue, 21-year-old Elvis Presley has rocketed on to the popular music scene with all the scorching fury of a meteor flashing across the sky. Make no mistake about it. Elvis is the new teenage idol of America. His first long-playing album jumped to the top of the best-selling charts in America's *Billboard* magazine within weeks of its release.

But that's merely the beginning of the story! His singles – "Heartbreak Hotel" in particular – have had a similar impact. "Heartbreak Hotel" leaped to the top of the American hit parade, and also had the double honour of being the "disc most played in jukeboxes", and "most played by disc jockeys." And now, these very same records are finding an eager, excited public in this country.

What magic does this phenomenon called Presley possess that he is able to mount the very pinnacle of show business is such a short space of time? Certainly, the man who has been dubbed "The hillbilly Johnnie Ray" is already at the top – and present public reaction demands that he should stay there.

He has been acclaimed as the successor to Johnnie Ray, and this has brought forth a spate of fan letters both for and against this claim. But no matter what the outcome of the argument, one thing is certain – Elvis Presley is here to stay.

Reports in a national newspaper recently have helped back up the Presley claim to mass idolisation. Quite definitely, this tall, lanky singer has already received the Johnnie Ray treatment.

He has been rescued from screaming crowds of teenagers in a police wagon; fans have broken windows of his car while attempting to get near him; girls have written phone numbers in lipstick over his car; and in Jacksonville, Florida, admirers tore the clothes off his back! This in addition to many letters of proposal!

A single note on his guitar can produce howls of admiration from a packed audience of teenagers. A song can turn them into a screaming, yelling, almost hysterical crowd!

Winning polls has become quite a common occurrence for Elvis. Last year he was voted the "most promising Country and Western artist" by C&W disc jockeys in America. He was also acclaimed the "best new male singer" and the "most promising country male vocalist of the year" during the same year. But remember, Presley is still gaining popularity, and the future holds even more honours.

And how do British fans feel about America's newest singing sensation? Johnnie Ray fans claim he could never replace their hero and, while some agree that "Heartbreak Hotel" is a good disc, they, nevertheless, intend to remain faithful to Johnnie.

From the other side of the fence, Presley fans are adamant that he doesn't copy Ray, and feel that he is already much better than the great "one and only". Elvis certainly has the swarthy, mysterious good looks to get the fans on his side. But the fans have also fallen for the deep

emotion, power – and sex appeal – in his voice.

ELVIS has an interesting background. Born in Tupelo, Mississippi, on January 8, 1935, throughout his early youth he was always surrounded by the folk music and blues associated with the deep South.

He soon took an active interest in music, and at the tender age of six began singing at folk gatherings, and also for his friends. During his youth Elvis worked hard, in the firm belief that one day he might reach the top.

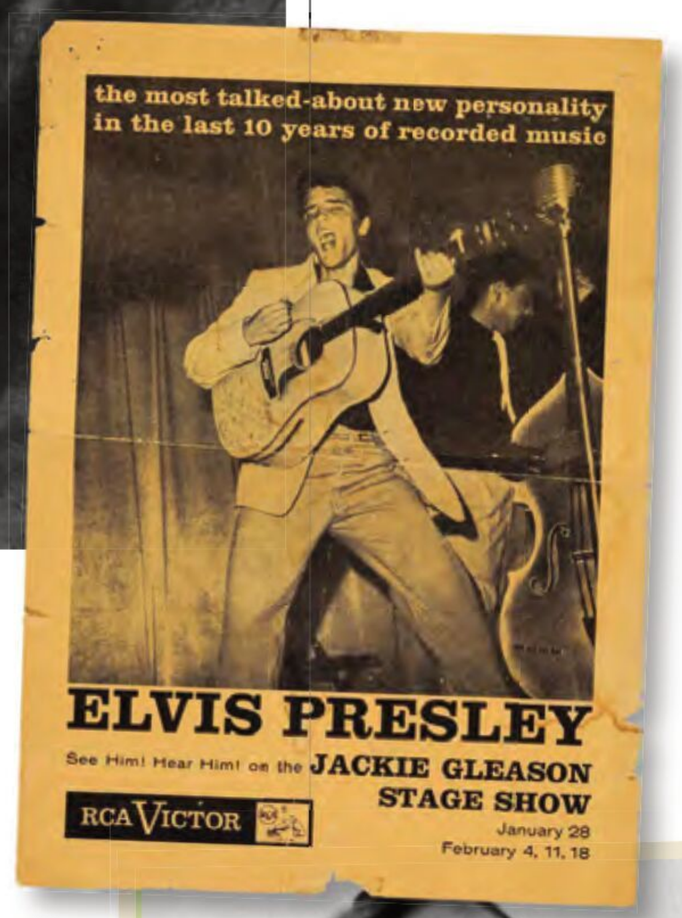
He never had any professional instruction, and his efforts at this time were the results of self-tuition. With no money to buy a guitar, he practised 'picking' on a broomstick. A little later he found money enough to buy a cheap instrument and, after more practice and hard work, was able to play tunes. He also sang on street corners to the accompaniment of his guitar.

While still a young boy, he had his first taste of real success when he won a prize in his first public performance at the Tri-State Fair in his hometown. And this is where the show business bug left its teeth marks on young Elvis.

Elvis went to high school when his family moved to Memphis, Tennessee and, although his main interest was still with his guitar and his singing, he earned a little extra money by doing odd jobs, including lorry driving. For the "kicks" and his own amusement, he decided one day to make a private recording at his own expense. With just this one thought in mind, he walked into the Sun Record Company, Memphis – and, in so doing, walked into stardom!

Sam Phillips, president of Sun Records, heard him sing – and signed him to a contract on the spot. Within a few months, following advice and coaching from Sam, Elvis had his first disc – "That's All Right" – released on the Sun label. It became an overnight hit – and Elvis has never looked back.

Since then his other discs have caught on with alarming rapidity. Tunes like the aforementioned "Heartbreak Hotel", "Tutti Frutti", "Rag Mop", "I Was The One", "Blue Suede Shoes" and "I Forgot To Remember To Forget" have made him a top recording artist, and an album of words and music to *Elvis Presley Juke Box Favourites* has now been issued in the States.



After graduating from school, Elvis began to make his first personal appearances, and at Shreveport he caused a minor sensation, he won numerous polls, and enlisted the aid of well-known popular C&W disc-jockey Bob Neal as his personal manager.

More coast-to-coast personal appearances followed, and as his popularity grew, America's teenagers dubbed him the "King of Western Bop". Sensation followed sensation! Teenage audiences were drawn to him like metal to a magnet. They screamed louder and louder at each performance, and just one indication of his immense popularity comes with the latest news that he has been smashing box-office records theatres throughout the South and South-West.

In recent months, his appearances on CBS Television's *Stage Show* have brought him an amazing amount of mail. Personal details about Elvis prove just why he has become the latest teenage "rave". Standing 6ft 2ins in his stockinged feet, and weighing 160 pounds, he has dark, wavy hair, blue eyes – and is unmarried. He has a huge appetite, and is reputed to eat a dozen eggs and either two steaks or a pound of bacon – for breakfast!

Outside of music, Elvis's main interest lies in his two Cadillacs – one in pink and black that carries him all around the country on his personal appearances, the other in canary yellow that he drives in his leisure hours. In addition, he also owns a station wagon and a motorcycle.

HE spends a good deal of time buying clothes, and has recently persuaded his 39-year-old father to retire. In his spare time, he has designed some of the furniture for the home he has refurnished for his mother. And yes, there's more – he now owns his own music-publishing company.

Elvis, 21, is one of the few artists who can claim "overnight success" in anything like the true sense of the words. He is, without doubt, one of the most astonishing personalities to break into the field of popular music for many years, and only recently was presented with a gold disc for his million-plus sales of "Heartbreak Hotel" for RCA-Victor, with whom he has signed a contract involving one of the highest sums ever paid to a new artist.

British fans may get the opportunity to see and hear Elvis in this country, in the near future, possibly in next year's London Palladium variety season. And, by that time, the "King of Western Bop" should have more than one gold disc to his credit! ***KEITH GOODWIN***

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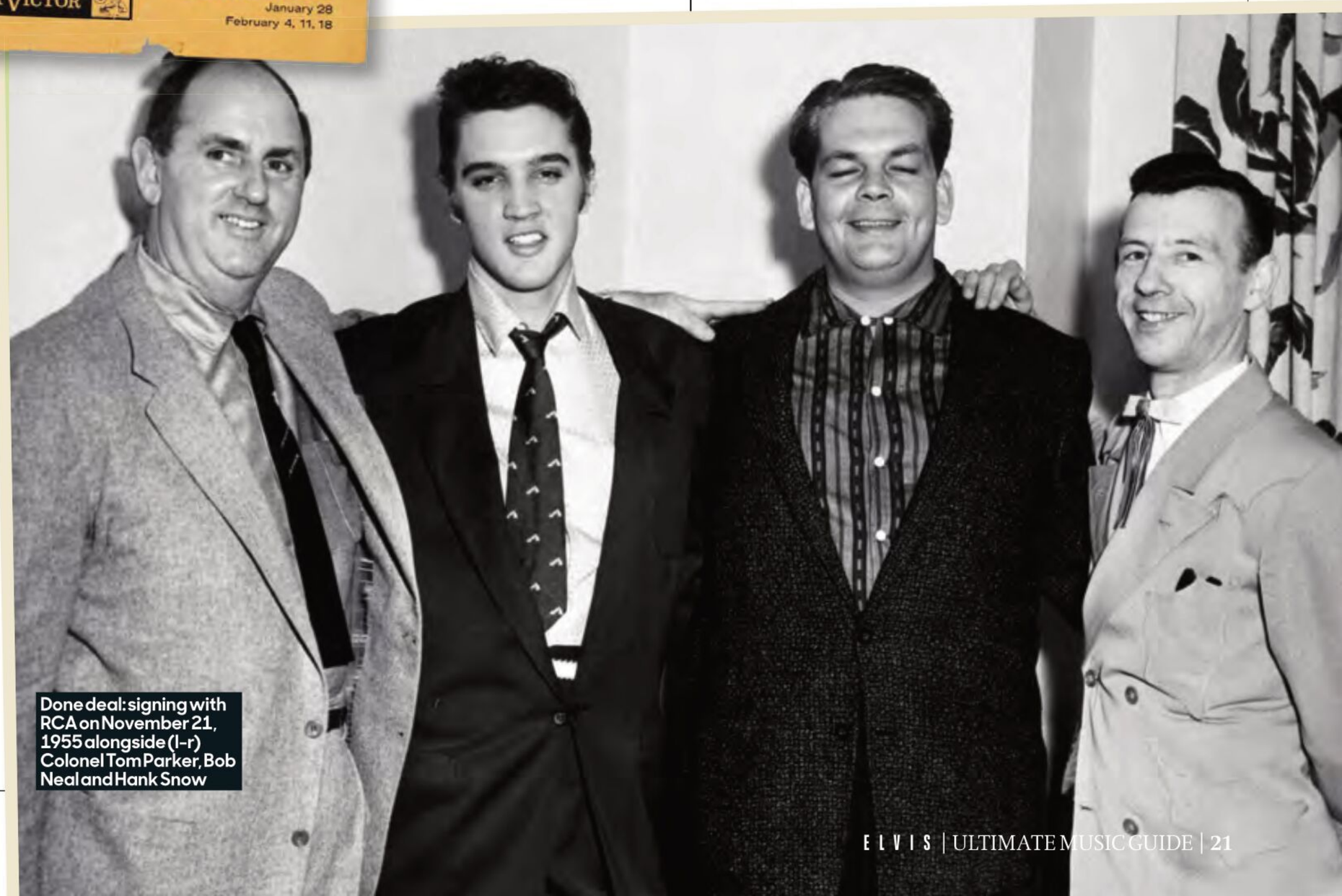


Done deal: signing with RCA on November 21, 1955 alongside (l-r) Colonel Tom Parker, Bob Neal and Hank Snow

NME | 15|6|1956

"WITHOUT preamble, the three-piece band cut loose. In the spotlight, the lanky singer flails furious rhythms on his guitar, every now and then breaking a string, In a pivoting stance, his hips swing sensuously from side to side and his entire body takes on a frantic quiver, as if he had swallowed a jackhammer.

"Full-cut hair tousles over his forehead, and sideburns paint his petulant, full-lipped face. His style is partly hillbilly, partly socking rock'n'roll. His loud baritone voice goes raw and whining in the high notes, but down low it is rich, and round.

"As he throws himself into one of his specialities – 'Heartbreak Hotel', 'Blue Suede Shoes', 'Long Tall Sally' – his throat seems full of desperate aspirates ('*Hi want you, hi need you, huh-huh-huh-huv yew-hew*') or hiccuping glottis strokes, and his diction is poor. But his movements suggest, in a word, sex."

That's the graphic description of Elvis Presley in full blast provided by *Time* magazine, in one of the hundreds of press stories fed to the world these past few weeks about the Hottest Thing in Show Business – a time-worn tag, but what newer phrase will do in its place?

Presley was almost unknown when Keith Goodwin first wrote about him in the *NME*, May 11. Today, it's hard to pick up a newspaper without having the letters of his name, a picture of his frame, his primitive non-electric gee-tar (strung up in the Spanish style) and his drugstore cowboy's suit stare you in the eyes.

His moaning, shouting "Heartbreak Hotel", a raw and rugged eight-bar blues which HMV were allegedly loath to release, is outselling everything else on that and most other British labels, with "Blue Suede Shoes" (the only other Presley disc obtainable here yet) following it lick-for-lick across the sales charts.

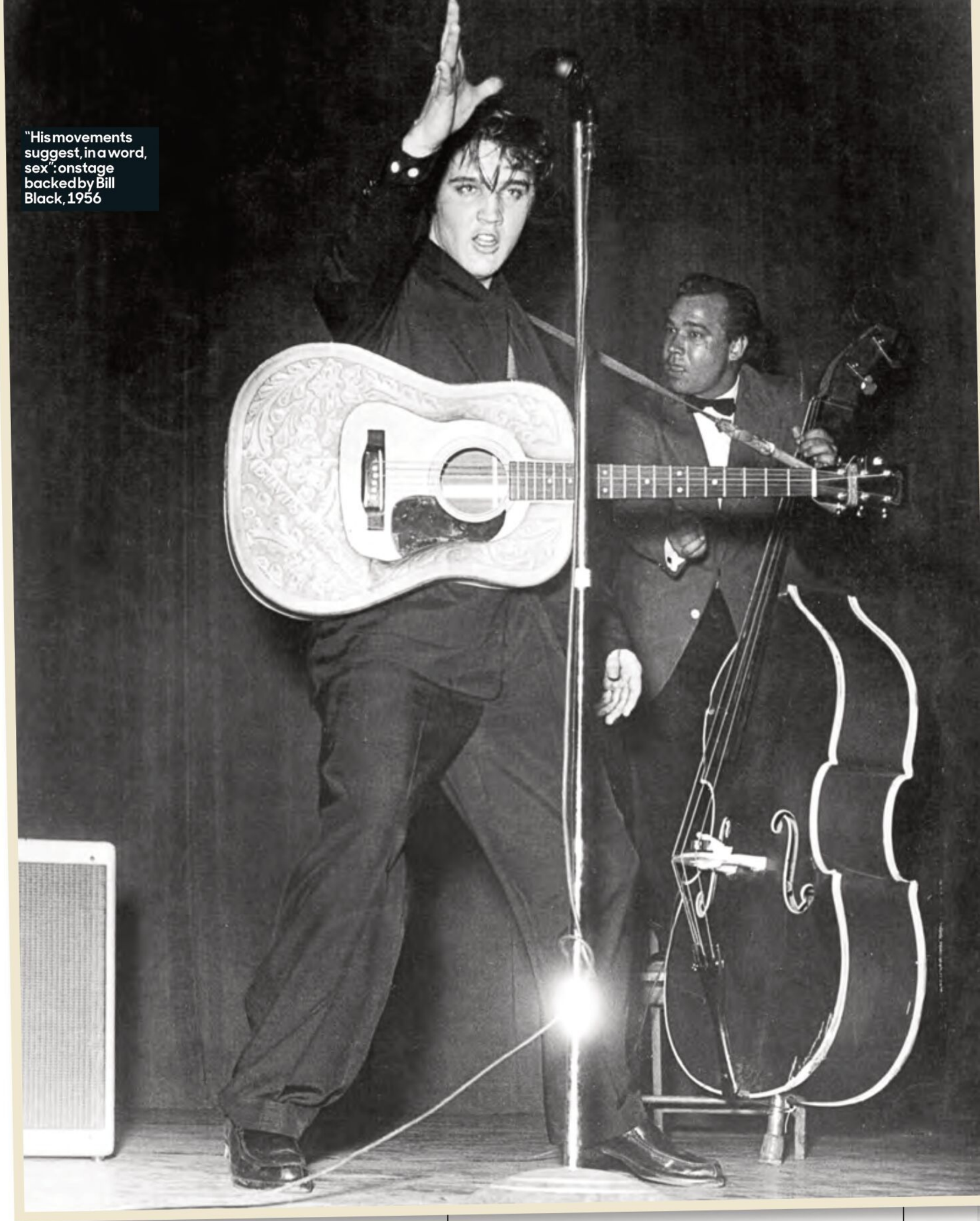
Letters in hysterical praise or wild revilement of Elvis dominate our "Talking Points" mail to such an extent that all the other current topics slung together would make a puny pile in comparison.

Firm statistics which help to show how the Presley craze has blitzed America were sent to us by [*revered US jazz critic*] Nat Hentoff in April – before the whole thing had built up to more than half its present strength. Elvis's records were moving at the rate of 50,000 copies per day.

He was accounting for more than 50 per cent of RCA-Victor's total pop turnover. In Canada, he had the first eight out of Victor's 10 top singles.

Personal appearances net him $7,500 a week as he travels (to quote *Time* again) "all through the South and West packing theatres, fighting off shrieking admirers, disturbing parents, puckering the brows of psychologists, and filling letters-to-the-editor columns with cries of alarm and, from adolescents, counter-cries of adulation."

Foster's Agency took the unprecedented step a few weeks ago of persuading Presley to leave some space in his itinerary for British dates NEXT YEAR. There was apparently no chance of bringing him here before then – but



"His movements suggest, in a word, sex": onstage backed by Bill Black, 1956

"I JUST DON'T KNOW NOTHIN' ABOUT THIS HERE NEW MOVIE ACTIN' BUSINESS"

Elvis Presley

TIMELINE THE BREAKTHROUGH

The King takes rock'n'roll from the ghetto to the mainstream and on to the silver screen, inspiring hysteria and controversy in equal measure.

1956

January

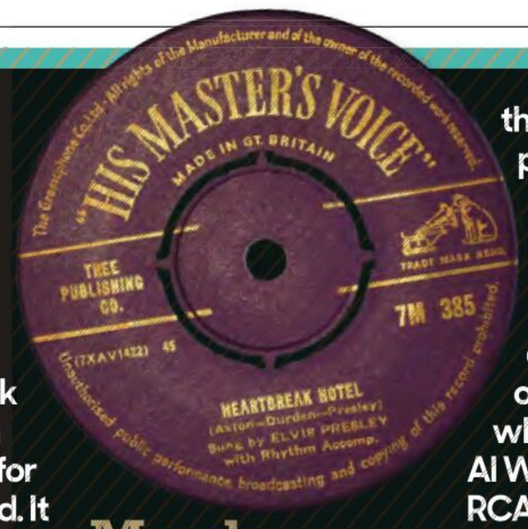
8 Elvis turns 21.

10 Elvis records "Heartbreak Hotel" in the RCA studio in Nashville.

28 Makes his TV debut on Jimmy and Tommy Dorsey's *Stage Show*, booked for four Saturdays in a row. He performs a version of Ray Charles' "I Got A Woman".

Elvis's TV debut on *Stage Show*, Jan 28, 1956

30 "Heartbreak Hotel", his sixth single but first for RCA, is released. It sells 300,000 in its first three weeks and will be his first million-seller.



March

13 His first album on RCA, *Elvis Presley*, is released. It tops the *Billboard* pop charts for 10 weeks.

17 Invited back for the first of two further appearances on *Stage Show*, where he meets Al Wertheimer, the RCA photographer who will take many iconic images of Presley over the next two years.

MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

managements are willing to take a chance on booking Elvis at HIS convenience! Meanwhile, the "King of Western Bop" is moving to Hollywood to make his first film under the terms of a long-term deal with Hal B Wallis – a producer whose judgement seldom misfires, whose pictures have taken a total of 27 Academy Awards, and who put such talent as Anna Magnani (*The Rose Tattoo*), Shirley Booth (*Come Back, Little Sheba*) and the Martin-Lewis duo into high-bracketed, secure fame.

A musical movie for Elvis with his unbridled vocalising heavily featured? Not on your life! Wallis sees the Mississippi boy as a potential Marlon Brando – the exact comparison drawn at Paramount where Presley will face the cameras this month.

"I just don't know nothin' about this here new movie actin' business," Elvis admitted to a *DownBeat* reporter. Yet the same article confirms, stressing that no-one had been led astray by "the same old Hollywood stuff", how widely among those who should know Presley "is being hailed as one of the most promising new dramatic actors since El Brando himself... solely on the strength of his screen test".

The story of how a Tupelo, Miss, 21-year-old has proved there is such a thing as an overnight star needs but the briefest of recapituations at this point. You'll know most of the facts by now.

Elvis's parents gave him a guitar when he was 11. "I beat on it for a year or two," he'll tell anyone within earshot. "Never did learn much about it. I'd sing blues and hymns that I learned from the Negroes – always with a strong beat."

A couple of years ago Presley was working as a truck driver, He made some private recordings and, on an impulse, took them along to Sam Phillips, president of the local Sun Records concern.

"They were terrible records. Sounded like someone beatin' on a bucket lid. I don't know why I took them along to Sun. That night, I went to the movies to try to forget, I was so ashamed of myself," the Hillbilly Johnnie Ray (another misnomer) confesses.

"16-YEAR-OLDS HAVE SEEMINGLY BEEN CARVING HIS NAME INTO THEIR ARMS WITH CLASP-KNIVES"

Nevertheless, Phillips thought the raw noises he heard on Presley's acetates held the prospect of commercial gold. He coached Elvis himself and, after six months, let him cut a rock'n'roll epic called "That's All Right" for release.

It sold throughout the South and South-West at a bedazzling rate, raking in enough coinage for Elvis to take on a personal manager (DJ Bob Neal), have a publisher accept a stack of his originals, and start touring as a full-time pro.

RCA-Victor noted the snowballing interest in his Sun sides as they continued to appear, and bought out his recording contract for a cool $35,000. "Heartbreak Hotel" (co-composed by Presley) came along before the trade knew what had hit them. The rest is, to coin a noun, history.

Check the most hopped up tales you ever heard in connection with the effect Frank Sinatra, Johnnie Ray – whoever you like – reputedly ever had on the younger representatives of US womanhood, girlhood or maniac-hood and you'll find a whole string of Presley legends to beat the lot.

In Jacksonville, Florida, we are told, a gang of uninhibited admirers tore the clothes off Elvis's back. Girls have been known to smear amorous messages in lipstick across his two famous Cadillacs – the pink-and-black and the canary yellow.

They smashed all the windows of his millionaire's wagon in Wichita Falls, Texas, so that they might touch his sleeve or obtain an autograph. However, the worrisome aspect of Presleymania at its most virulent can be gauged by a report from Fort Worth, Texas, where 16-year-olds have seemingly been carving his name into their arms with clasp-knives – or another from Oklahoma City where a newspaper man barely escaped with his life after the ministrations of teenage "debs". "Touch him," one of them yelled. "Maybe he's touched Elvis!"

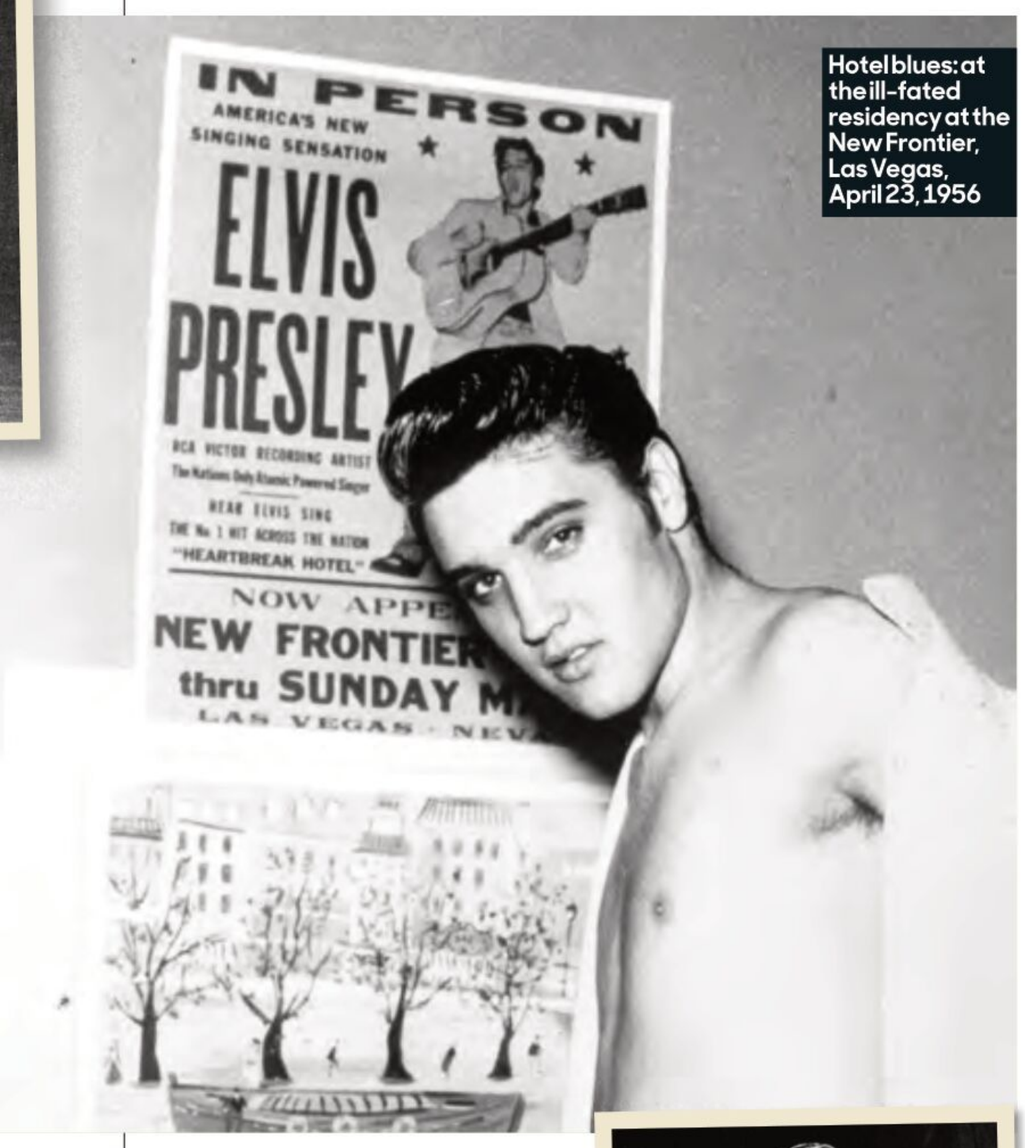
But any performer with an unvarnished, near-folk manner of projection will find trouble in coming to terms with a white-tie-and-mink audience who generally have no liking at all for rural rhythms. At the New Frontier club in Las Vegas about two months ago, "There was little screaming to be heard, but some fully grown female listeners matched the star squirm for squirm. As for Elvis, he spent some of his off-stage time amusing local showgirls, but most of it amusing himself in a small amusement park, where, for hours on end, he and his cronies rode the dodgem cars." (*Time*).

That ill-wished run at Las Vegas collapsed after a few nights. Elvis and his representatives decided forthwith not to repeat a similar mistake. He may even play concerts only in Britain, 1956, to avoid the possibility of antagonising a family music-hall crowd.

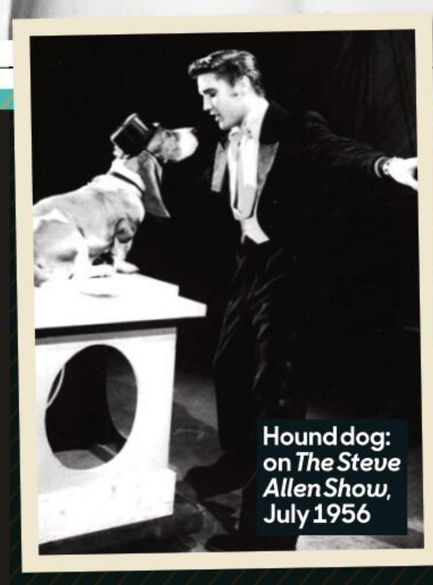
Charles Gruenberg, of *The New York Post*, writes of him: "Presley, after his first trip to New York, suddenly was embarrassed to find that sideburns reaching to the lobe of the ear are out of fashion, so he trimmed them slightly to effect a compromise between New York and Tennessee tastes. He has also discarded, for city wear, the gaudy, black-trimmed pink shirts that had become his trade-mark, so much so, in fact, that pink and black are the 'official' Presley fanclub colours.

"He still is not accustomed to carrying large sums of money, and invariably he absent-mindedly leaves a wad of several hundred dollars behind him in his dressing room after he finishes an engagement."

MIKE BUTCHER



Hotel blues: at the ill-fated residency at the New Frontier, Las Vegas, April 23, 1956


Hound dog: on *The Steve Allen Show*, July 1956

Towering figure: fans gather outside the Paramount Theater, New York, ahead of the first showing of *Love Me Tender*

BETTMANN/GETTY IMAGES, NBC TELEVISION/GETTY IMAGES

April

3 Elvis appears on *The Milton Berle Show* singing "Jailhouse Rock".
6 Elvis signs a seven year deal with Hal Wallis and Paramount Pictures.
21 "Jailhouse Rock" hits No 1 in the US. It stays there for two months.
23 Elvis begins a two-week residency at the New Frontier Hotel in Las Vegas. It is, however, a relative flop.

June

5 Elvis performs "Hound Dog" for Milton Berle, his gyrations provoking moral outrage. "Should be confined to dives and bordellos," bawls the *New York Daily News*.

July

1 Presley appears on Steve Allen's NBC TV show. Allen has him sing "Hound Dog" to a basset hound.
2 Elvis records an incendiary version of "Hound Dog" at RCA Victor studios.

August

Shoots his first film, *Love Me Tender*.

September

9 Ed Sullivan reverses his boycott of Elvis. Presley's three-appearance deal is worth $50,000, the highest ever figure for a variety show performer. It reaches 82.6 per cent of America's TV audience.
26 Tupelo proclaims this Elvis Presley Day. He performs two shows at Mississippi-Alabama Fair. 100 National Guardsmen surround the stage.

November

16 *Love Me Tender* opens in New York City.

THE WORLD'S MOST CONTROVERSIAL SINGER WRITES FOR YOU!

Here it is – the first article ever written for a british publication by that dynamic recording idol – *Elvis Presley*

NME | 7|9|1956

I'M afraid to wake up each morning. I can't believe all this has happened to me, I just hope it lasts.

Thanks to all my faithful teenage fans, I have made a lot of money all of a sudden. Just two years ago I was driving a truck for $35 a week in Memphis, Tennessee, and before that I was knocking down $14 a week (that's less than £5 in your money) as a theatre usher.

Then one day my father gave me a guitar. Although I didn't know a B-flat from C-sharp, I finally learned to play.

My career as a singer started by accident. I went into a record shop to make a record for my mother, just to surprise her. Some man in there heard me sing and said he might call me some time. He did... a year and a half later.

He was Sam Phillips, the owner of Sun Records, and I made a couple of records for him. Mr Steve Sholes, who is the head of country-western music at RCA Victor, happened to hear one of them and wanted to sign me up with his company.

It was Mr Sholes who gave me "Heartbreak Hotel" to cut and, as you know, it turned out to be a million-seller.

A lot of people ask me where I got my singing style. Well, I didn't copy my style from anybody. I've got nothing in common with Johnnie Ray, except that we both sing – if you want to call it singing.

I jump around because it is the way I feel. In fact, I can't even sing with a beat at all if I stand still.

The kids are really wonderful the way they respond to my style. I get around 10,000 fan letters a week. So many people all over the country are starting fan clubs for me.

I certainly am grateful to them all, and in answer to some of the questions they ask, here are a few statistics about myself.

I was born in Tupelo, Mississippi, on January 8, 1935. I was raised and went to high school in Memphis, Tennessee, which is still my home. I never took any singing lessons, and the only practising I ever did was on a broomstick before my dad bought me my first guitar.

Present danger: Mom and Pop Presley display a single day's worth of gifts sent to Elvis at their Memphis home

I'm six feet tall and weigh 195 pounds. I've gained about 20 pounds in the last year. I can't understand that because my appetite isn't as good as it used to be. I don't have much time for regular meals any more, because I'm always travelling around the country, working in a different city every day.

I usually gulp down a quick sandwich in between shows, but when I can, I enjoy having a big dinner with three pork chops and plenty of mashed potatoes and gravy.

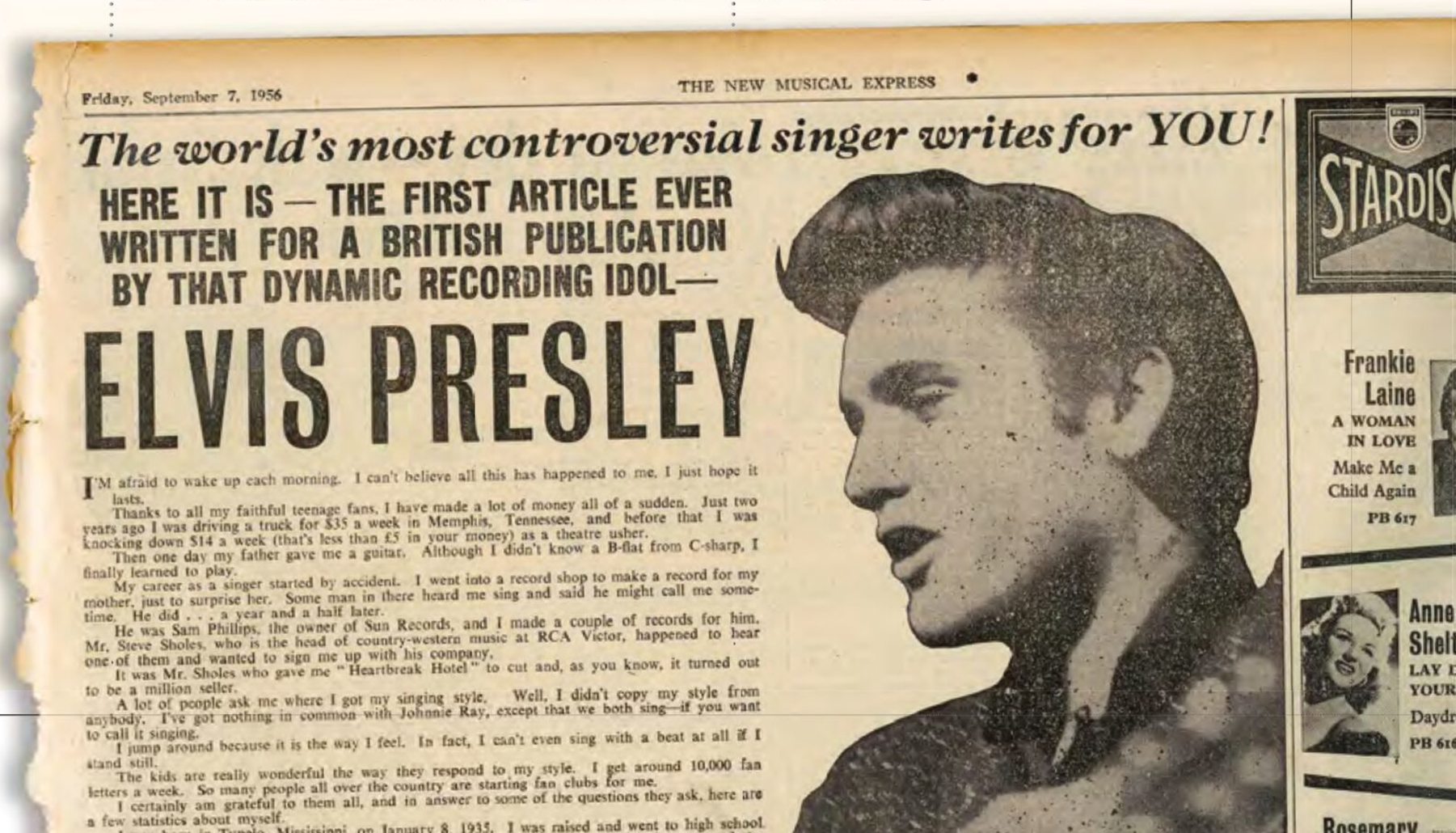
I understand there have been a lot of rumours concerning me. I am beginning to think they have more rumours about me than records. A while ago, they thought I was dead. Well, I'm as alive and kicking as I'll ever be.

> **"I'M BEGINNING TO THINK THEY HAVE MORE RUMOURS ABOUT ME THAN RECORDS"**
> *Elvis Presley*

I can't seem to relax ever and I have a terrible time falling to sleep at night. At the most, I usually get two or three hours of broken sleep. There was even a wild rumour that I shot my mother. Well, that is pretty silly. She's my best girl friend, and I bought her and Dad a home in Memphis, where I hope they'll be for a long, long time. I made my father retire a few months ago. There isn't much sense in his working, because I can make more in a day than he can make in a year. There were some rumours, too, about my getting married.

Well, I have no plans for that, and I am not engaged. I guess I just haven't found the right girl yet. Besides records and personal appearances, I am looking forward to making a movie. I took a screen test a couple of months ago and Paramount Pictures signed me to a contract.

In fact, everything is going so fine for me that I can't believe it's not a dream. And, if it is, I hope I never wake up.



Friday, September 7, 1956 THE NEW MUSICAL EXPRESS

The world's most controversial singer writes for YOU!

HERE IT IS — THE FIRST ARTICLE EVER WRITTEN FOR A BRITISH PUBLICATION BY THAT DYNAMIC RECORDING IDOL—

ELVIS PRESLEY

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BETTMANN/GETTY IMAGES

Screen for me: recording a performance for *The Ed Sullivan Show*, LA, September 9, 1956

FOR THE FIRST TIME, AN ARTIST HAS ATTAINED A 'GOLDEN RECORD' – BEFORE THE DISC WAS ON SALE

NME | 28|9|1956

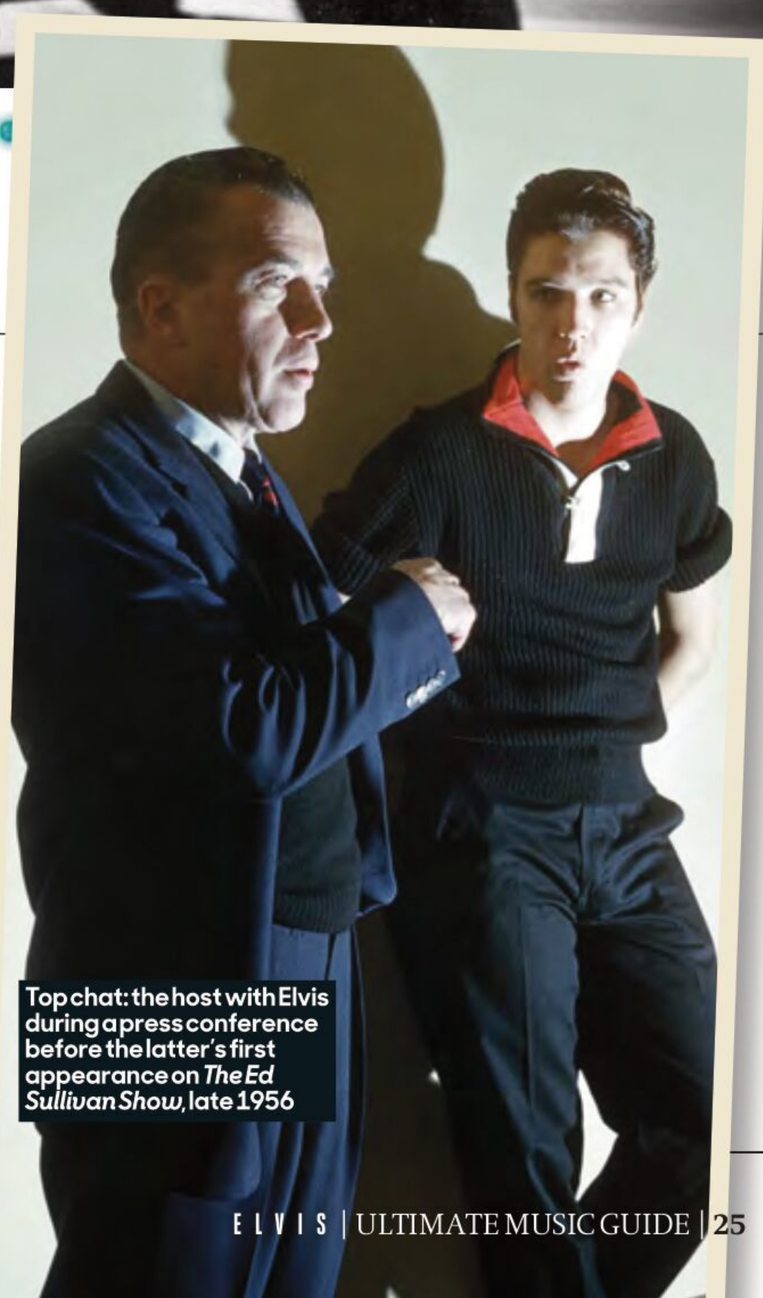
ELVIS PRESLEY has made recording history. When he appeared on the Ed Sullivan *Toast Of The Town* TV show from New York on Sunday, September 9, he introduced the title song from his forthcoming film, *Love Me Tender*. At the time, this composition had not been recorded – but from every part of America, RCA-Victor were besieged with fantastic orders, which reached the phenomenal figure of one million on Tuesday of this week!

Although Presley has since waxed "Love Me Tender", the recording is not yet available to the public. Accordingly, for the first time ever, an artist has attained a "Golden Record" —before the disc was on sale.

It has been announced by Paramount Pictures that Hal Wallis will produce Presley's next Hollywood film – *Lonesome Cowboy* – early in December. Meanwhile, *Love Me Tender* has been completed with unusual haste; November 15 marks the premiere in New York.

Together with Vera Matson, Presley has composed all the four songs featured in the movie. Furthermore, Presley has the publishing rights to the complete *Love Me Tender* musical score.

Late next month, Presley's manager Col Tom Parker, will confer with London agent Harry Foster in New York, regarding dates in Britain next year for Elvis.



Top chat: the host with Elvis during a press conference before the latter's first appearance on *The Ed Sullivan Show*, late 1956

MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES; FOTOSINTERNATIONAL/GETTY IMAGES

Released:	AUGUST 1957	AUGUST 29, 1958	Record Label:	RCA

LOVING YOU / KING CREOLE

Hollywood didn't help Elvis become a serious actor — but it didn't stop him making serious music. Two film soundtracks confirmed his pop idol status. | *By* PAUL MOODY

"IT'S not my future you care about, it's yours. It's what I can do for you," snarls guileless hillbilly singer Deke Rivers (Presley) at hard-headed press agent Glenda Markle (Lizabeth Scott) in 1957's *Loving You*, having realised his image and talents are being exploited at every turn.

By September 1956, Elvis could have been forgiven for thinking the same thing himself. Appearances on both *The Milton Berle Show* and *The Steve Allen Show* had caused Elvismania to spread like wildfire, making him America's most in-demand star. However, having signed a contract with Paramount Pictures for one film – with an option for six more – in April 1956, the singer's long-held hopes of establishing himself as a respected screen actor were quickly dashed as those with vested interests lined up to capitalise on his success.

It was film executives at Fox – to whom Presley had been loaned for his screen debut – who started the ball rolling. They converted his first film (originally entitled 'The Reno Brothers') into a vehicle for the singer's music, renaming it *Love Me Tender* and shoe-horning in four songs (the title track, "Let Me", "Poor Boy" and "We're Gonna Move"), released as the chart-topping "Love Me Tender" EP in November 1956.

The die had been cast. Barely three years on from his chart debut in July 1954, Elvis was no longer the hip-swivelling high priest of the rock'n'roll youthquake, but a bankable commodity whose megawatt screen charisma could be marketed most effectively as a matinée idol. Released in July 1957, his third long-player – and first soundtrack – *Loving You* captures Elvis at this pivotal point in his early career.

Recorded in sessions scattered over the first two months of 1957 with producer Steve Sholes and fleshed out with studio off-cuts and four tracks from the "Peace In The Valley" gospel EP, it largely sacrifices the primal rock'n'roll of his first two albums for a combination of cornball pop songs and country ballads. Recruited specifically for the film, popular gospel group The Jordanaires provided tasteful backing vocals to tone down the raunchiness and appeal to a mass audience.

Which isn't to say *Loving You* doesn't have its stellar moments. Opener "Mean Woman Blues" – cut at Radio Recorders in Hollywood in January 1957 – sizzles with intent, the 22-year-old Elvis growling, "*I sometimes think she's almost mean as me*", while the singer and his band – Scotty Moore and Hilmer Timbrell on guitar, Bill Black on bass, DJ Fontana on drums – cook up a storm on a riotous "Let's Have A Party" and a blink-and-you've-missed it "Hot Dog".

Written by Ben Weisman, a propulsive "Got A Lot O' Livin' To Do" marks the beginning of Elvis's most productive songwriting partnership – he would record 57 Weisman compositions over the next 20 years – while a haunting "Lonesome Cowboy" reminded listeners Elvis could do tender, too.

A sign of what lay ahead came with the film's biggest hit, however. Recorded in the hangar-like surroundings of Paramount's Scoring Stage on the insistence of studio boss Hal B Wallis – rather than Presley's preferred studio, the more intimate Radio Recorders – the saccharine "(Let Me Be Your) Teddy Bear" reduced Elvis to the status of a cuddly toy, his unhappiness reflected in the song's brevity; at just 1:45 it was to be his shortest-ever hit.

If the album's chart success – it topped the US charts for 10 weeks – confirmed his status as America's brightest star, by the end of 1957, Elvis, much like Deke Rivers, was being forced to reappraise his relationships with those around him. Frustrated by

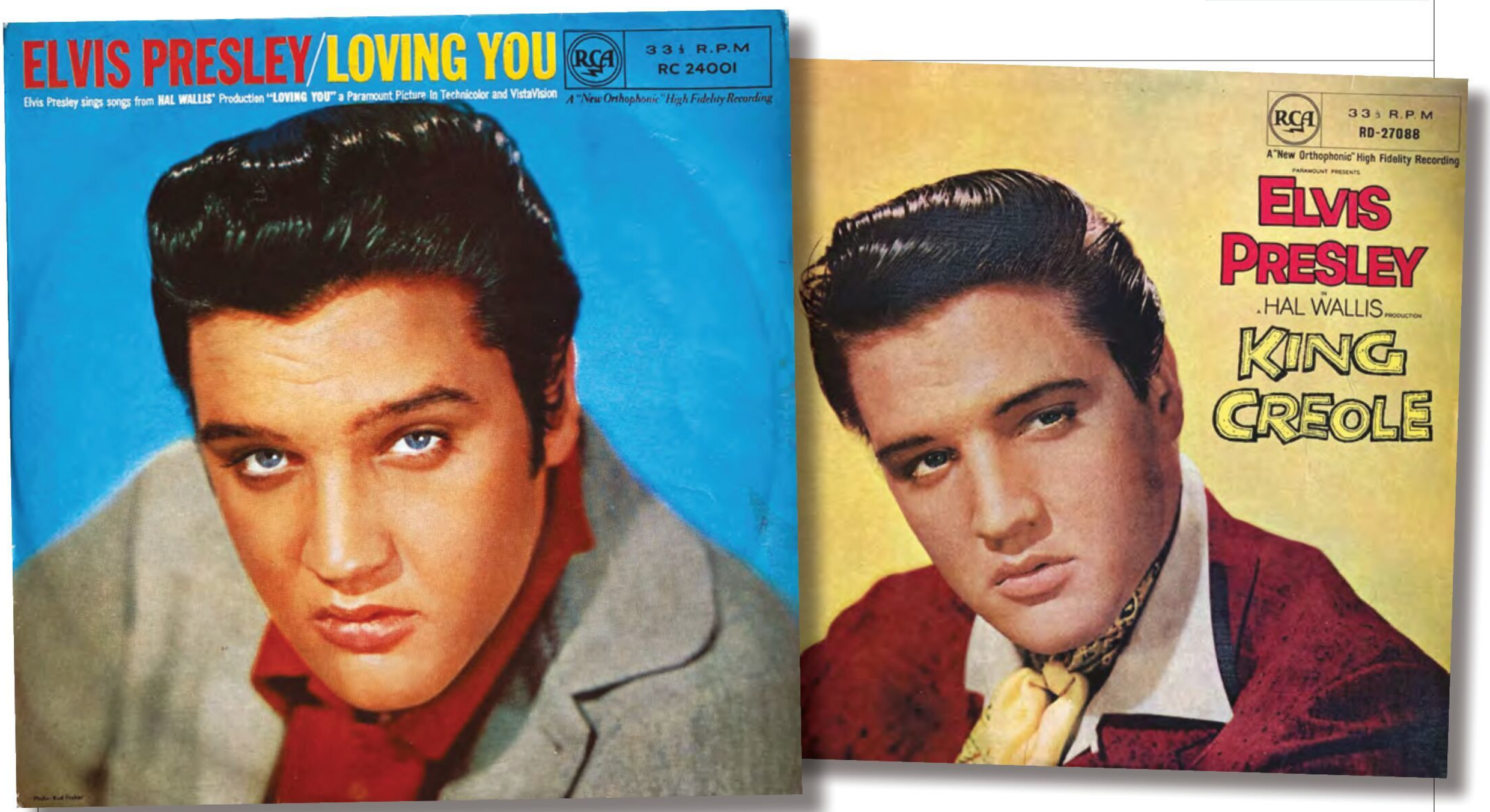
CRITICS' VERDICTS

LOVING YOU

"Elvis scores best with the beat numbers. 'Mean Woman Blues' and 'Teddy Bear' – his best-seller – are the standout tracks. But his admirers will find no faults with the rest."
LAURIE HENSHAW, MM, 31/08/1957

KING CREOLE

"Altogether a most listenable album, which gets better the more you play it. And the guitar work in various rock numbers is first-class."
ALLEN EVANS, NME, 12/09/1958


ELVIS PRESLEY/LOVING YOU
Elvis Presley sings songs from HAL WALLIS' Production "LOVING YOU" a Paramount Picture In Technicolor and VistaVision
A "New Orthophonic" High Fidelity Recording
33⅓ R.P.M
RC 24001
RCA
33⅓ R.P.M
RD-27088
A "New Orthophonic" High Fidelity Recording
PARAMOUNT PRESENTS
ELVIS PRESLEY
IN A HAL WALLIS PRODUCTION
KING CREOLE

★★★

ELVIS

All that glitters: Elvis Presley rocks his gold jacket in April 1957

MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

“The Almighty has gifted me great energy. I’m using His gift.”

In a second year of mad success, Elvis becomes “The Pelvis”. While British writers enthuse over his staggering income and “thump-thump beat” American colleagues are charmed by his humble attitude when making films. “He knows his business,” says movie director **HAL WALLIS**, “and gives others credit for knowing theirs.” At year’s end, the glamour abruptly ends with a draft notice.

NME | 12|7|1957

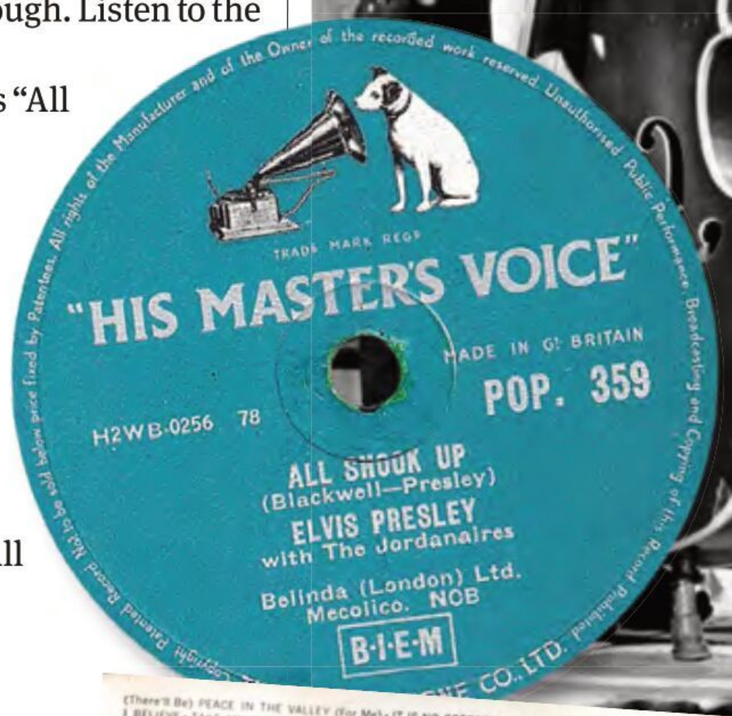
PRESLEY is back! To his legion of ardent fans, he's never been away... he's been ever-present. But to Hit List compilers, he is back! It took just three weeks for his latest hit, the breathless, jerky "All Shook Up" to jump up the *NME* Top 30 ladder to top place.

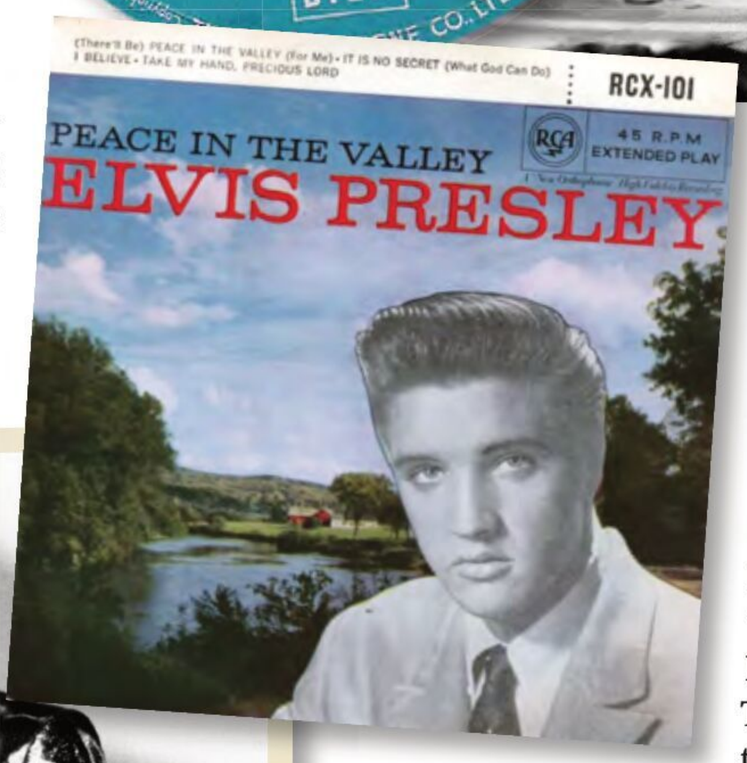
Even when dealers were allowed "request only" 45 rpm copies – made specially for American Forces in Europe – enough were sold to make the Hit List. Now that HMV's "All Shook Up" is released on both 45 and 78 rpm, record dealers can't get copies fast enough. Listen to the disc and find out why.

Presley makes you believe he's "All Shook Up" and in Luv (and he probably was when he waxed the master!). Breathless and (at times), broken-voiced. His modulation uncontrolled – listen how it rises suddenly as he hits the line "*scares me to death*". There is slurred diction when it comes out that way ("*mah hay*" for "my hair", etc). All with an exciting background of rhythmy guitars and a thump-thump beat!

Yep, when Elvis chants "*Ah'm in luv*... (silent pause)... *Ah'm all shook up*", he gets you "all shook up", too!

Elvis has two other records on the go at the moment, too. There's "Teddy Bear " and an EP called "Peace In The Valley", both issued by RCA. On the EP, Presley is a sort of singing Billy Graham. He gives a great sincerity to such hymn-like songs as "It's No Secret What God Can Do", "I Believe" and "Take My Hand, Precious Lord". They could take their place in any church service.





Elvis in his $2500 gold-leaf suit with designer Nudie Cohen, 1957

This EP was the result of Presley singing "There'll Be Peace In The Valley For Me" on Ed Sullivan's TV show in New York. Next day a deluge of requests came for the record. So Elvis made his Peace album.

Elvis was five when he started singing in church and he has never lost his love of religious music. In his personal record collection are treasured copies of the Statesmen Quartet, the Blackwood Brothers Quartet, the Jordanaires and other sacred singing groups of the South.

With his semi-religious album, Presley throws a spanner into the arguments of parents who don't think Presley is good for their children. In America, they found that they could say nothing against him when they discovered their teenage families were listening to an almost hymn-singing Presley as well as the "All Shook Up" stuff.

It made them think again before accusing Elvis of having the power to make their children disregard them and follow The Pelvis. This controversial young man of 22 got parents as well as children "all shook up"!

His inborn sincerity makes everything he does – be it a beaty pop number or a rhythm-and-blues semi-classic – sound more exciting than the rest do. He is the personification of the "free teenager". He does what he wants, when he wants. He represents to teensters on both sides of the Atlantic what they want to be, and can't – free, unrepressed, without inhibitions.

They are ready to defend him to the end, with an almost fanatic disregard for law and order. Yet they endanger him at the same time. The fan who writes a rude, even threatening, letter to a writer who criticises Elvis, will also tear the shirt from Elvis's back and scratch him, just to say he or she has.

Presley himself doesn't seem to mind the maulings he gets from his fans. He once told film star Natalie Wood: "They want my shirt, they can have my shirt. They put it on my back to start with."

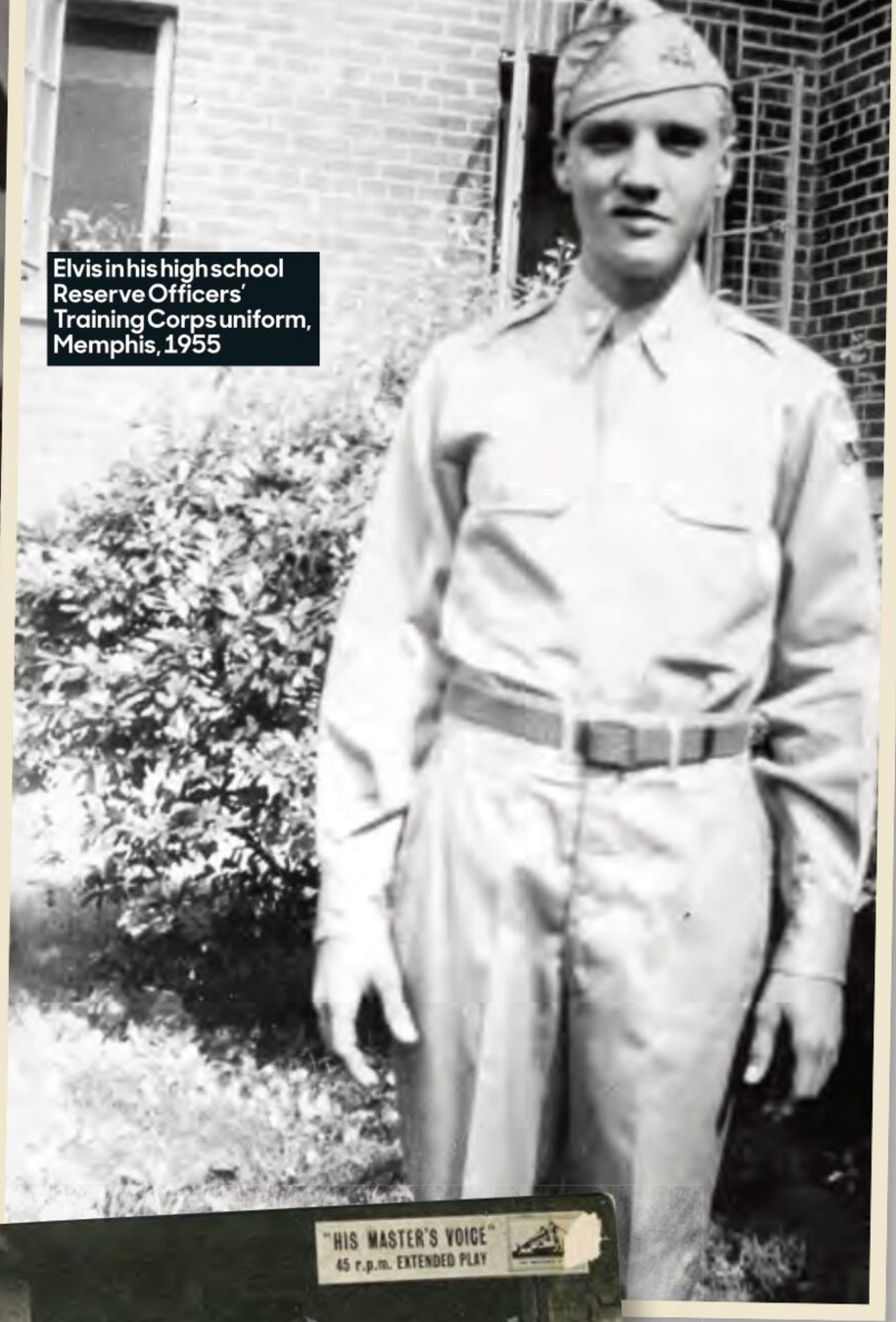
Colonel Tom Parker, Presley's father-like manager, worried more about his "son's" safety. When fans broke the glass in one of Elvis's cars so they could touch him, the Colonel became alarmed lest the singer be cut. Now there's wire mesh protecting the windows – and Elvis.

Presley cannot go anywhere without bodyguards. Fans seem to sprout up everywhere he goes. They wait for hours for a glimpse of him. After a concert to 8,000 screaming followers at the Memphis Auditorium, he had to wait hours before he could safely leave for home.

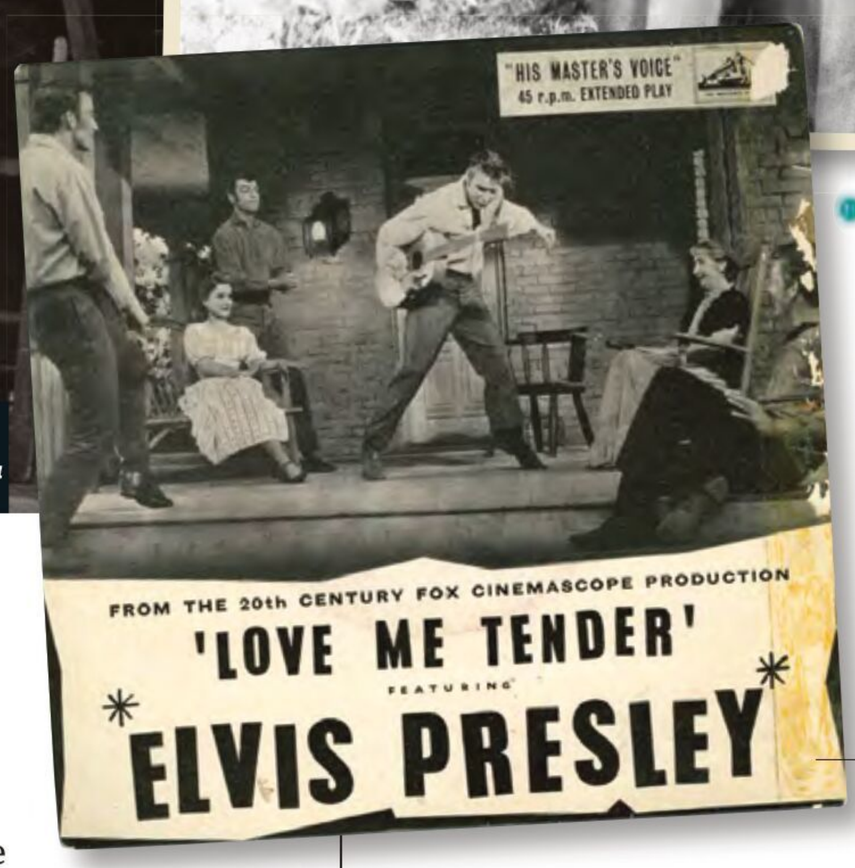
Even when Elvis isn't around – and he's never been to Britain yet – you can buy souvenirs of him other than his records. Hank Saperstein looks after this end. He came to Britain last year to

COLLECTION CHRISTOPHEL / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO; MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

Elvis with his real band in the *Loving You* movie, 1957



Elvis in his high school Reserve Officers' Training Corps uniform, Memphis, 1955



promote the sales – as he does in the States – of such things as Presley jeans, T-shirts, caps, charm bracelets, pens, pencils, compacts, watches, wallets and other things bearing the name and/or the picture of the side-burned country boy from Tupelo, Mississippi.

He was disc-overed by disc jockey Bob Neal, put on wax by Sam Phillips of Sun Records, presented first on the stage by impresario Tom Diskin. With the Colonel and advance-man Oscar Davis, they form a team which is still behind Presley and receives a percentage of his earnings.

But there's plenty left for Elvis. He is estimated to sell 13 million single records this year, bringing him more than a million dollars. A quarter more will come from films, a hundred thousand from TV (Ed Sullivan paid him top price of 50,000 dollars for one show – presented him three times during it – opening spot, middle and end), and another two hundred thousand from personal appearances.

Add to this his immense songwriting profits and you have the highest paid performer in the world today. Money doesn't worry Elvis much. He's rather give a good performance than get an extra five thousand dollars for a show he didn't enjoy playing.

He is a frank person. He admits he likes girls. "I've thought I've been in love. Mostly I've played the field. I enjoy dating more than anything. Can that be wrong?" he has asked openly.

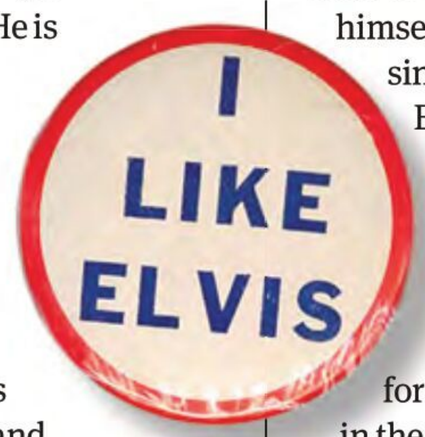
He confesses he giggles easily and can start laughing helplessly, almost collapsing from weakness, at the simplest thing. His bedroom is in a permanently untidy. He admits he collects stuffed animals, even teddy bears. In other words, he's an honest citizen. No side about him, or secret self.

Recent reports are that he wants to join the army. He is tired of being dubbed, wrongly, a "draft dodger". Elvis is honest enough with himself to know that while he'd like to go on singing and entertaining – and come to Britain – he should be doing what all other chaps of his age must do – a hitch in the services.

Elvis has a soft spot for uniforms. He was in the officers' training corps section while at school.

Elvis has large cars – but still gets more kicks out of tinkering around with two old motor bikes he and his dad bought before he hit the jackpot.

ELVIS enjoyed making his first film – *Love Me Tender*. His fans loved it. A London teenage girl told me recently: "I saw it 11 times! It was super!"



She can get ready for more visits to the cinema. Elvis has made two more pictures – *Loving You*, in Vista Vision Technicolor, the first of a seven-picture contract for Paramount, and *Jailhouse Rock*, for MGM. His next film will be *Sing You Sinners* [*later retitled King Creole*] which starts production in the autumn.

In *Loving You*, Elvis sings 10 new numbers, including Danny Kaye's former hit, "Candy Kisses" and "We're Gonna Live It Up", "Hot Dog", "Teddy Bear", "Mean Woman Blues" and others.

In pre-recordings, he was accompanied by the Jordanaires and the three young musicians who always back up Presley recordings – drummer DJ Fontana, electric guitarist Bill Black and bass Scotty Moore. These boys appear in the film as a hillbilly band.

The musical numbers were created and staged by Charles O'Curran, who is at present honeymooning in these parts with songstress Patti Page. Elvis plays the part of a smalltown rock'n'roll singer who is discovered by a female press agent (Lizabeth Scott) and introduced to a Hillbilly bandleader (Wendell Corey), who hires him. He falls for the girl vocalist, played by Dolores Hart. The film will be showing in London next month at the Plaza cinema.

PRESLEY WORKS HARDER, SINGS HARDER AND LIVES IT UP HARDER THAN HIS RIVALS

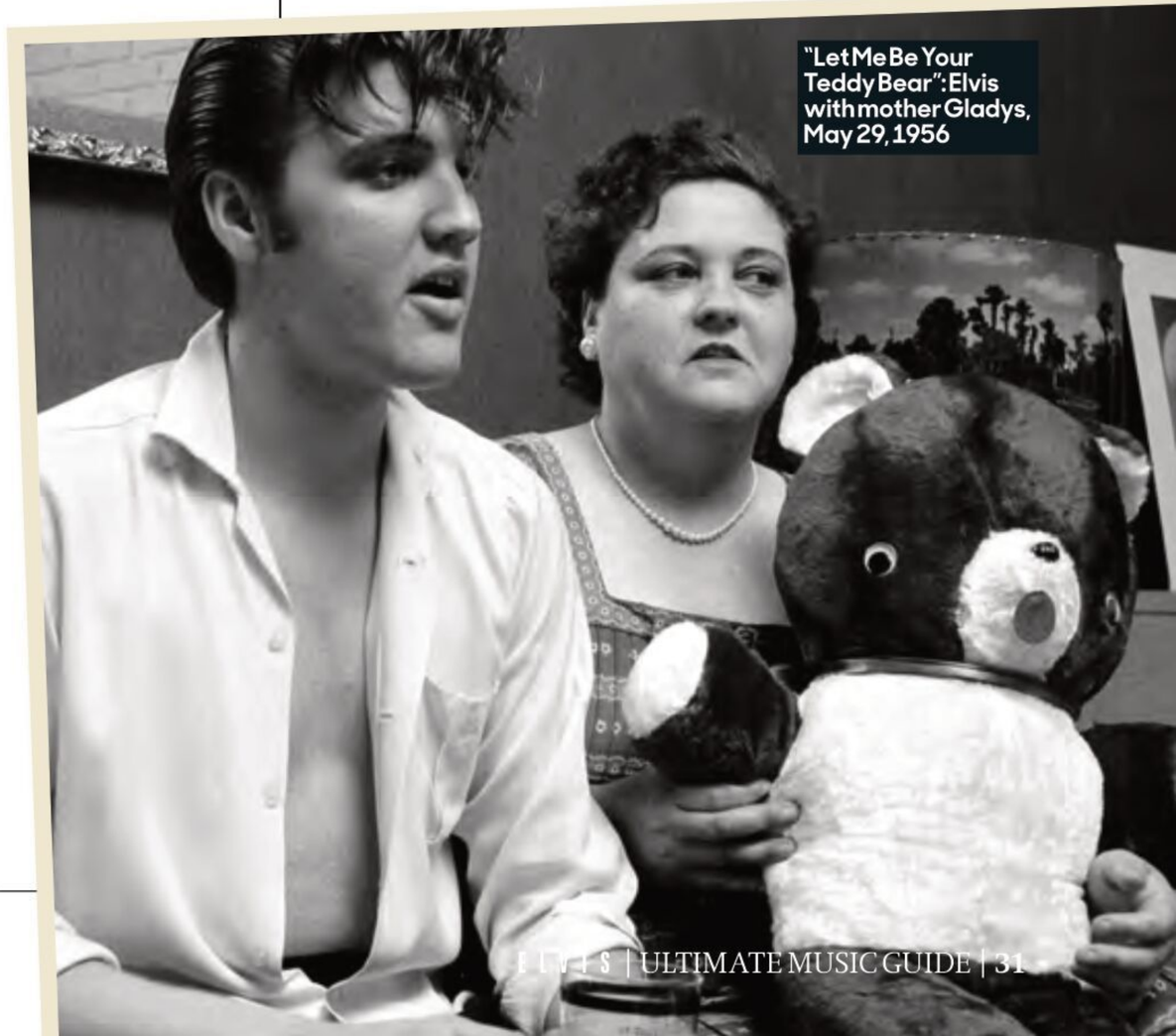
What are the chances of Elvis Presley visiting these shores to sing in person? Elvis wants to come, but there are so many dates lined up for him in the States including the probable army hitch – that it seems almost impossible to fit things in.

One thing is certain – if he did come over, his reception would make all others seem as flat as the opening of a vicarage garden party by the local mayor after a curvy film star failed to arrive!

Presley works harder, sings harder and lives it up harder than his rivals – and in return The Pelvis gets every ounce of response from his fans! So call out the riot squad!

As one teenager told me: "I'm an Elvis Presley fan – body and soul!" And she meant it!

ALLEN EVANS



"Let Me Be Your Teddy Bear": Elvis with mother Gladys, May 29, 1956

MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES; PHILLIP HARRINGTON / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

"ELVIS IS THE GUY THEY START OUT TO HATE AND END UP LOVING"

Charles O'Curran

NME | 26|7|1957

SAYS choreographer Charles O'Curran: Elvis Presley is the guy they start out to hate and end up loving. The "they" I'm talking about, film studio workers – actors, technicians, commissary (canteen) workers, administration, policemen and the like – you find on any of Hollywood vast picture-making lots.

Elvis works the transformation with a natural ease. He knows that inside show business there may be great fraternity, but there is also great jealousy. Those at the top of the tree are resented by those who failed to scale the heights.

Elvis is right up there on the top branch. But he's not like an ape, laughing down at the others, dropping coconuts on their heads! No, sir. Metaphorically, he may be on top of the entertainment tree, but he's still got his feet firmly on the ground and his head is no bigger now than when he was an unknown country boy in Tennessee.

Round the studio he endeared himself to most fellow-workers by calling himself "Elvis Pretzel", the name the folk who don't like him invented. (A "pretzel" is a salted, ill-shaped piece of biscuit given free in American bars to beer drinkers to make them drink more.)

One technician admitted to me two weeks after the picture got started: "Y'know, me and the boys were all ready to hate this Presley, what with his antics we read about in the papers. We tried hard to, but I gotta admit we even look forward to him coming on the set now. He's just like us... one of us."

In the front office, he won the admiration of the executives at Paramount by declaring to them: "Gentlemen, you know the motion picture business. I don't. I'll do most anything you say." And he did, too.

Hal Wallis, the great producer, a rare mixture of financial and artistic film making genius, said to me: "I like a youngster like that – who knows his business and gives others credit for knowing theirs."

Of course, Presley doesn't take advice blindly. Or act on decision without some thought. For instance, *Loving You* was at first titled "Lonesome Cowboy". Presley argued us out of calling the film "Lonesome Cowboy" – aided by his manager, Colonel Tom Parker. Elvis just told us in his soft, Tennessee drawl: "I'm not a cowboy singer. I sing hillbilly, and there's a mite difference between the two styles. "I wear dungarees, but that don't make me a cow-puncher." Fair enough. The title of the picture was changed.

Jailhouse Rock, May 1957

But we kept in the song, "Lonesome Cowboy". That was my doing. I had picked the tunes for him, carefully – and it isn't all that easy finding numbers for him, ones that will suit his style of singing. I knew he'd like "Lonesome Cowboy" and would want to sing it when he saw the production I had built up round it.

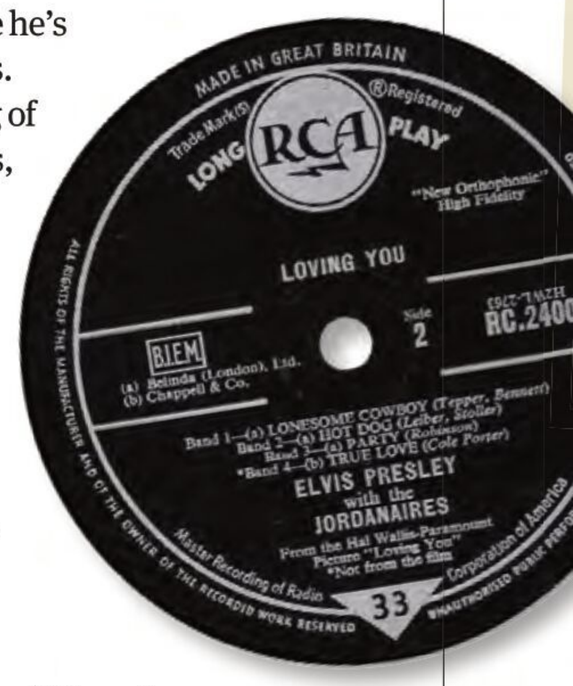
"It's not a cowboy song so much as a dramatic ballad," I told him.

Elvis didn't look too happy. "I'm not all that good on ballads," he said frankly. I reminded him of the hit *Love Me Tender* had been.

He didn't show much emotion. Flattery gets little reaction from him. He just thanked me for my complimentary remark. But he heard the song and got to like it. By the time we came to put it into the picture – one of the highlights of *Loving You* – he was crazy about it.

(I must admit, though, that my wife, Patti Page, helped me to sell Elvis on "Lonesome Cowboy". Patti didn't know it, but while telling him about the song, I happened to say that Patti liked it. Elvis hadn't connected me with Patti up till then. "Patti Page?" he asked. I said she was my wife. Right then I could feel a warmer reaction. He admitted he had all her records).

Elvis admits there's a bit of Irish in him somewhere! Because he's slightly superstitious. During the recording of the musical numbers, he revealed this.



He had been trying "Teddy Bear" before we recorded it. Just before starting recording he said to me: "I want it to be a big hit. To ensure this, I'm giving it my special treatment."

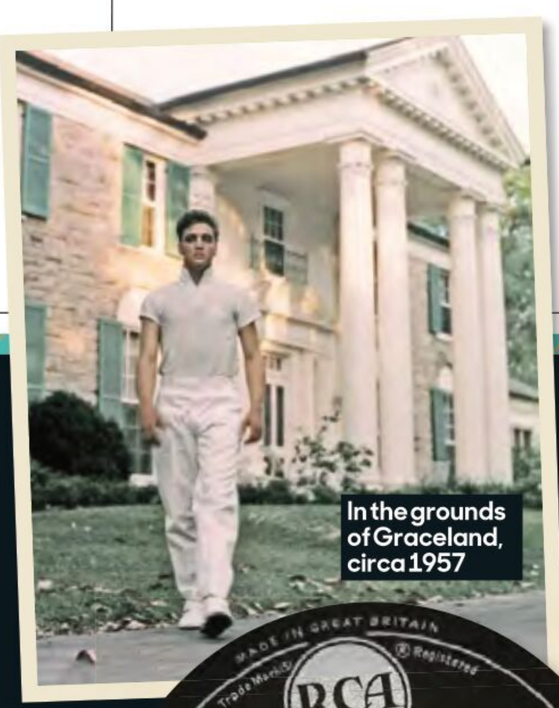
Whereupon he turned his guitar over and beat the tempo on the back of the instrument, the strings making a different sort of sound as they vibrated.

"There! That's a little extra I give only to tunes I want to be hits," he admitted, grinning.

Fact was, he had only done it for one number before that – his successful "Don't Be Cruel". After he had recorded "Teddy Bear" with the reverse guitar oompha, oompha rhythm he said "Bet that'll be the hit number... Better be after I've given it my special hit treatment."

I laughed, "Superstitious, eh? " He nodded. "Bit, I guess."

On the set, Elvis is one of the gang. When he walks on to it, you can feel the added electricity in the air. In print, that may sound trite. But it's true. And yet he takes such a



In the grounds of Graceland, circa 1957

TIMELINE FROM STAGE TO SCREEN

As Elvismania spreads far and wide, despite our hero's curious unwillingness to travel very far, plans are afoot to further his movie career and fulfil his duty to Uncle Sam...

1957

January
6 Elvis's final appearance on *The Ed Sullivan Show*, filmed from the waist up only. Elvis starts filming *Loving You*. He shares his first screen kiss with actress Jana Lund.

February
3 *The New York Times* runs a headline "Presley Records A Craze In Soviet Union". Elvis records are being cut on old X-ray plates and sold on the black market in Leningrad for $12.50 – a vast sum.

March
Elvis buys Graceland.

April
Elvis performs outside the US for the first time with four shows in Canada – two in Toronto on April 2 and two in Ottawa on April 3.

May
Starts work on his third feature film, *Jailhouse Rock*.

July
Loving You premieres and goes box office Top 10. "Teddy Bear", lifted from the film, is a hit.

MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

Keys to his art: on the set of *Loving You*, 1957

back seat, never pushes himself forward. He has smiles and kind words for everyone, usually encouraging those who need it and always taking time out to help someone with a trouble or a worry.

He drives to the studio in a Cadillac, but admits he gets more fun out of the bicycle he's been allotted to travel around on inside the Paramount lot. It's not an unusual sight to see him racing against some junior members of the staff, or trying to do some trick cycling. Mr Wallis welcomes this, because he feels as I do, that Presley doesn't relax enough.

Elvis works hard all the time. He's very nervous and pent up 'til the job is done. To give you one example of his inability to take it easy when he has time to do so, we once stopped a recording session at mid-day.

I was informed I couldn't record again until 7pm. So I told Elvis we could knock off for seven hours. Believe me, I was glad of it. It was hot. I made for a cold shower and a divan bed. Not Elvis. When I went back at 7pm, he was still in that studio! He had been playing the piano and singing for seven hours, giving exclusive performances to janitors, secretaries, office boys, anyone who passed and stopped to listen.

And when we started to record again, he was as fresh as a daisy – fresher than I was, and I'd been sleeping! The more singing he does the better he is. He warms up for an hour before any work – be it recording, a concert or a TV show.

And he never sings the song he is to record during that hour's warm-up. He sings everything but, never sparing his voice. Then he starts on the new number with a fresh vigour. When he got to know me better, he asked me about Patti's multiple recordings – in which she records three or four times on the same tape, so that she makes her voice into a trio or quartet.

I explained it to him and suggested he might like to try it. Again his humour came through with: "Isn't one Presley enough?" yet he may try multi-recording later.

Presley is a very sincere, hard worker. His punctuality is quite remarkable. It makes me embarrassed. If I say to him that we start at 10am, he's there at 9.30am, warming up, just as he has been while driving to the studio.

Yet for all his fame, when we go to the commissary for lunch he becomes a real hick stargazer. "Who's that?" he'll ask me. I'd tell him. "Gosh, d'you think we could meet him?'

In this way, I introduced Presley to many stars. They have been equally pleased to meet him, of course, specially when they find him so wide eyed, just like the fans who follow him so ardently.

Once Elvis was delighted with himself. He said to me: "No need to tell me who that is – it's Yul Brynner!" Sure enough, the shaven-headed heartthrob was sitting nearby and once again I made introductions. They chatted for a full 15 minutes.

Then Elvis got the biggest kick of his career. His father and mother came to the studio one day and I suggested they take part in the film, as two members of an audience in a scene. Elvis thought this was a terrific idea. And imagine how he laughed when he came back and reported to me: "Dad and Mom are teaching those extras how to clap rhythmically for my number. They'll be film directors yet!"

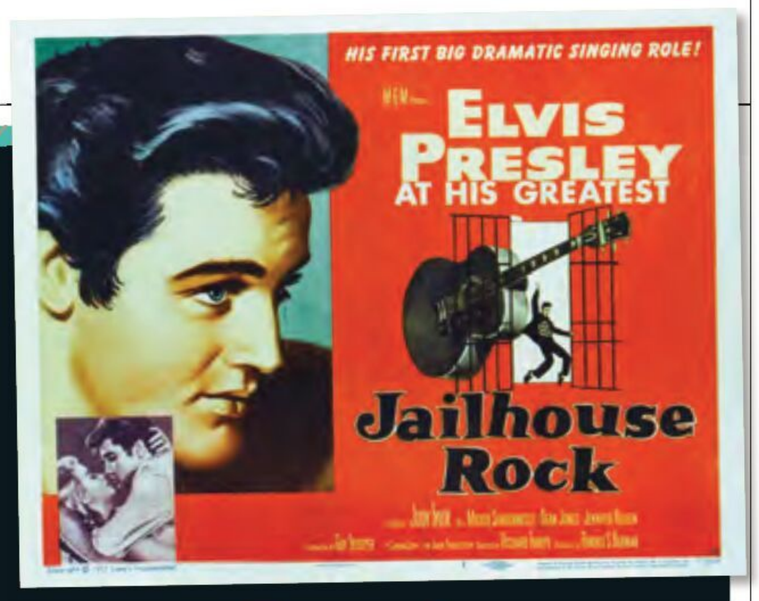
Later he took his parents to the studio restaurant for lunch and pointed out all the other stars (whom I introduced him to before). He'd wave to them and get a wave back just to prove he was on friendly terms. His parents' eyes goggled!

Elvis is best summed up as a wonderful boy, conscientious, a good guy who likes to work and thinks there aren't enough hours in a day to work in.

"Some folk say I work too hard," he once told me "But they are judging me on how much work they can do, not how much I feel like doing. The Almighty has gifted me with great energy, an ability to work hard for long spells. I'm just using His gift."

Is it any wonder I'm looking forward to September, when I start working again with the greatest gift to any film director – Elvis Presley!

> **"WHEN HE WALKS ON SET, YOU CAN FEEL THE ADDED ELECTRICITY IN THE AIR"**
> *Charles O'Curran*



PARAMOUNT PICTURES/SUNSET BOULEVARD/CORBIS VIA GETTY IMAGES, MOVIEPOSTERIMAGEART/GETTY IMAGES

August
31 Elvis performs outside the US for the final time, in Vancouver.

September
27 Back in Tupelo, Elvis performs a benefit for the Elvis Presley Youth Recreation Center. The grounds include Elvis's birthplace. He will donate regularly to the centre for the rest of his life.

With Hank Garland at the Mississippi and Alabama Fair And Dairy Show, Tupelo, September 1957

October
17 *Jailhouse Rock* premieres in Memphis, opens nationally in November and makes the Top 5.

November
10-11 Elvis performs shows in Hawaii for the first time.

December
During his first Christmas in Graceland Elvis receives his draft notice.

PAN PACIFIC AUDITORIUM, LOS ANGELES

LIVE!

Monday, October 28, 1957

NINETEEN thousand shrieking, hysterical fans crammed into two fantastic, out-of-this-world vocal exhibitions by Elvis Presley here in the Hollywood auditorium on Monday and Tuesday evenings!

They screamed, wriggled, jumped up and down in their seats with uncontrolled delight as the rock'n'roll singer cavorted on the platform before them, and made it quite impossible for any journalist to attempt an impartial criticism of his staggering performance.

Throughout the entire 50 minutes of Presley's shattering antics on the Monday night concert I saw, the entire auditorium was a seething, contorting mass of wriggling humanity, reacting with shrill screams and convulsive jerks to every breath of the Presley voice, every twitch of the Presley hips! It was unbelievable.

A firework display from 1,000 flashbulbs – the amateur cameramen outnumbered the professionals – greeted Elvis's arrival on stage, resplendent in a gold lamé jacket, lined at lapels, cuffs and pockets with glittering jewels which threw stabbing shafts of reflected light across the auditorium as he moved. And how he moved!

A jerk of the hips, a dip and sway of his expressive knees as he swung the guitar impulsively across his rolling body... each movement brought gasps and yells, swoons even; this was not just audience reaction, but sheer mass hypnotism of an amazing kind.

Despite amplification, the singer's voice was frequently rendered inaudible by the cries of the worshipping multitude before him: he whipped them into a frenzy, and the more sane members of the audience were able to watch two shows for the price of one, as fans fainted in dozens with the excitement, falling like ninepins in the aisles and across the rows of seats.

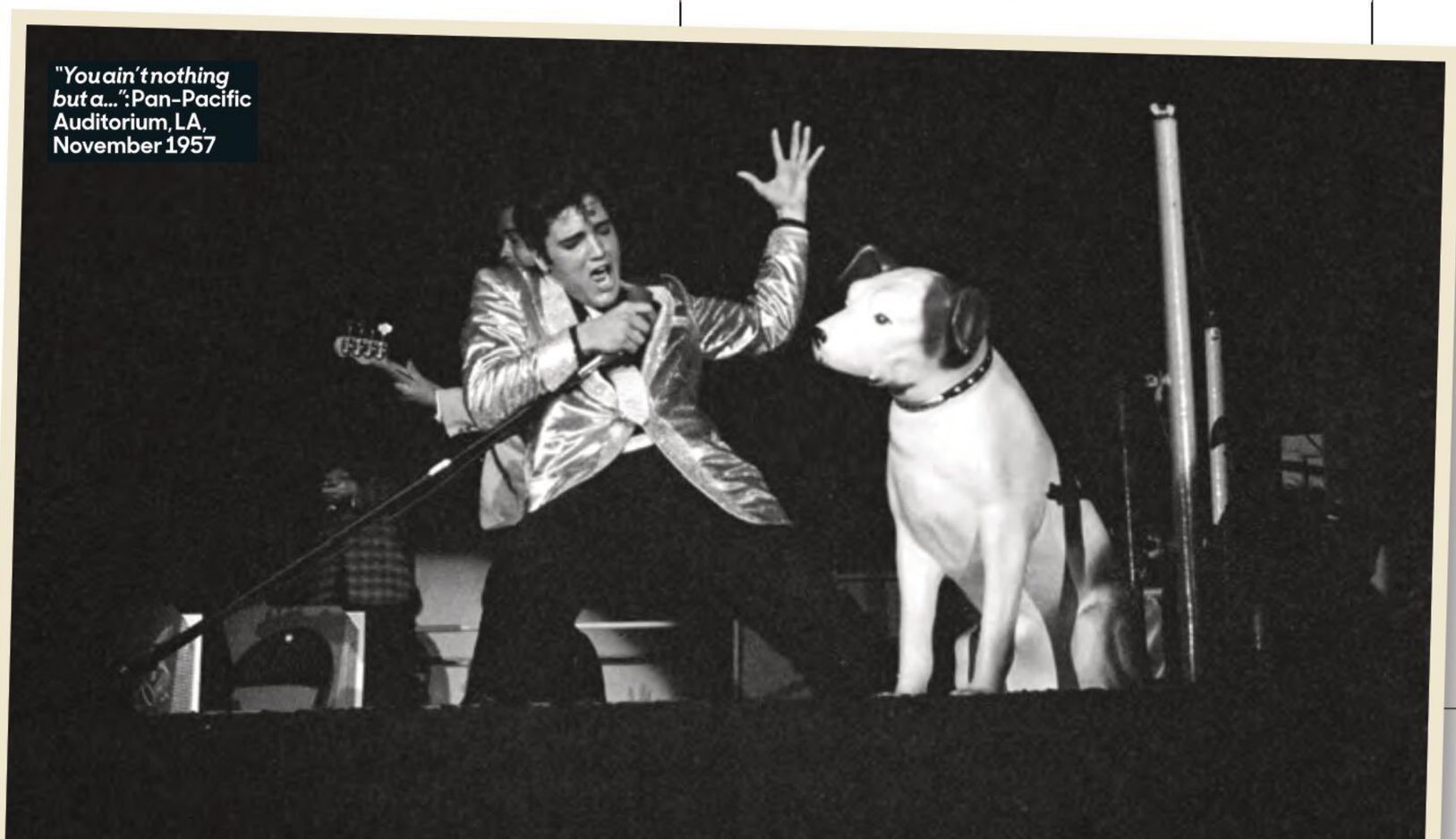
Twenty-five police officers lined the approaches to the stage throughout the performance, and first-aid teams were kept busy reviving the casualties – who, as soon as they recovered consciousness, invariably pleaded to return to the auditorium so as to get their money's worth!

HE SETS OUT WITH AN ALMOST SADISTIC INTENT TO AROUSE THE FANS TO FEVER PITCH

For his show, Presley was backed by the Jordanaires and a four-man instrumental group, but it was Presley the fans had come to see, and they certainly had value for money.

It was his body movements rather than his voice which whipped up such an atmosphere of out-and-out hysteria, and it was obvious that Presley knew it. On this showing, I cannot believe Presley's contention that his hip and leg convulsions are involuntary on his part, and are just stimulated by the atmosphere created by his audiences.

He deliberately sets out with an almost sadistic



"You ain't nothing but a...": Pan-Pacific Auditorium, LA, November 1957

ARCHIVE PHOTOS/GETTY IMAGES

Shaking things up at the Pan-Pacific Auditorium, LA, November 1957

intent to arouse the fans to fever pitch; in this there is no denying he succeeds. Some of the fans I watched were getting obvious physical pleasure just from watching Presley work, and he played on their reactions with deliberation and, it must be admitted, with devastating effect.

They say that Elvis is the only singer who wears out his trousers from the inside – and now I know just what they mean!

I have never in my life seen audience reaction like this; surely never in this century has an artist been able to command such unconditional surrender from his audience.

The 15 songs that formed his act included all the obvious record hits, starting with "Heartbreak Hotel"; other numbers less familiar to my British ears were "I Was The One", "That's When Your Heartbreak Begins", "When My Blue Moon Turns To Gold Again", "Dreaming Eyes" and "I've Got A Woman". A mock piano-playing spot also managed to create more hysteria and, under such noisy conditions, a straightforward review of Presley's performance became impossible.

Takings at each of the two concerts amounted to the equivalent of around £9,500, with seat prices averaging 3 dollars (£1) apiece! Not bad takings – £19,000 for two nights! ***MAURICE KINN***

BACKSTAGE INTERVIEW!

Elvis spills the beans on musicality and songwriting to *NME*'s Maurice Kinn

NME | 22|11|1957

"I CANNOT read music, cannot play the guitar, have never written a song, nor do I rehearse for performances."

If Elvis Presley had said any one of those things to me when I talked to him in his dressing-room before Monday's concert, I would have been very surprised. As it was, he made all four staggering statements in one breath, and I was absolutely flabbergasted!

When I asked him why, therefore, his name often appears as part composer on sheet music and record credits, he replied:

"I have never written any part of a single song, but often people bring me material and offer me one-third of the royalties if I record their song. If the composition is considered suitable – and only if it's suitable – I make a disc and collect my one-third share of the composers' royalties!"

"As for studying music," Presley continued, "I really don't see any point in it. I've got 17 gold records already, and already orders for my new Yuletide album exceed a quarter of a million." He grinned. "Somehow I don't think Bing Crosby will appreciate my version of 'White Christmas', though."

I asked him who were his favourite singers and he named Pat Boone, The Four Aces, Dean Martin, Tommy Sands, The Ames Brothers and Ricky Nelson.

Presley tells me that he calculates his earnings last year were "around two million dollars," but says he only talks to his manager, Colonel Tom Parker, when it is absolutely necessary to have a business discussion with him. Presley is very keen to play a straight part in a film and says he would like to play a flyer in an air film, perhaps.

He does not intend to work outside America unless he has to, a fact which will disappoint thousands of British fans – and says that if rock'n'roll dies he cannot change his singing style.

But from what I saw at the concert which followed the interview, he hasn't got anything to worry about for quite a while yet! "Are you proposing to work in any other countries?" This was the $64,000 question posed to Elvis Presley by reporters prior to the fantastic concert in Hollywood, which I reported [*opposite*] for *NME*.

Came the reply: "I don't intend leaving America – unless I've got to."

This sparked off a whole series of further questions from the many newshounds crammed tightly into Presley's dressing room, But later I was able to reopen the subject with Presley, and even more fully with his manager, Colonel Tom Parker.

What they both told me will come as a great disappointment to the many thousands of British fans who would jump at the chance of seeing Presley in the flesh. It was obvious that Elvis will not appear here unless his popularity in America takes such a sharp slump he is forced to go further afield to earn money.

It can be revealed that the major reason, outside of monetary considerations, why Elvis the Pelvis will not be coming to Britain is that he is averse to air travel.

All his journeys to and from dates in America are by car. This flying objection seemed somewhat surprising, particularly in view of Presley's desire to play a pilot in an air film – though with doubles and back projection, all things are possible, when the movie magicians get to work!

Financially, these days Presley can pick up the American equivalent of from £7,000 to £10,000 for one night's work on concerts; should he waste anything up to a month on a trip to Britain, for pay which couldn't possibly resemble the astronomical heights that American promoters can afford?

For if Presley came over by sea, after driving from his West Coast headquarters to pick up the ship, nearly four weeks would be wasted in travel, which might otherwise have been taken up with making money.

Films, too, keep him continually in demand. While last year he did upwards of 50 concerts, this year Elvis has managed to sandwich in only about 15 dates between film shooting schedules.

Further movie plans will keep him tied up for a long time to come; making an overseas trip out of the question even if he wanted to undertake one. While many American artists have substantially slashed their salaries to appear here, they have done this for prestige purposes, for good will and to boost their disc sales. At the present time, however, Presley's policy appears to have no need of such sales aids.

As has already been reported, even top national newspaper writers had to pay for their tickets at recent Presley concerts – indeed, when I saw the Presley show from the front row of the stalls, it was by courtesy of Col Parker, who actually went to the box-office and bought me the seat in exchange for a back area ticket I had already purchased.

With newspaper men queueing for personal interviews – over 100 are on the waiting list at the moment – and every newspaper in the world falling over itself to report Presley's every move, he shows no apparent concern about good will.

So there it is: unless Elvis Presley's popularity in America takes an alarming dive very suddenly, British fans will have to content themselves with his films and his records. It may be hard news, but is the rock'n'roll sensation wise in his attitude? Only time will tell.

NME | 27|12|1957

ELVIS PRESLEY has been called-up into the United States Army – but strong efforts are being made to delay his entry by two months.

Presley has been told to report for duty on January 20. A week earlier he was scheduled to start work at Paramount studios on *King Creole* — the new title given to "Sing, You Sinners".

It would cost Paramount between $300,000 and $350,000 if Elvis is drafted on January 20, reports Nat Hentoff by cable . The studio have asked that his call up be put back for eight weeks, until the film was completed.

When the conscription papers were received by Elvis at his Memphis home, he is reported to have said: "I'm kinda proud. It's a duty and I'm going to do it."

His pay as a soldier will be £28 monthly. His earnings in 1957 are estimated at more than half a million pounds!

ARCHIVE PHOTOS/GETTY IMAGES

Released: 1957 - 1972

Record Label: RCA

THE RELIGIOUS ALBUMS

How great thou art! One King salutes another, as Elvis's mother helps reveal the liturgical side to his musical heritage; a consolation to which he would return throughout his career. | *By* **TERRY STAUNTON**

FOR all the shock and outrage of his pelvic thrust on early TV appearances, it was a different, more modest small-screen performance that revealed a significant component of Elvis Presley's character. Two days before rock'n'roll's biggest star's third visit to *The Ed Sullivan Show* on January 6, 1957, the host suggested his guest "sing a hymn or semi-religious song", perhaps mindful of jittery sponsors threatening to withdraw their financial support.

The song, chosen by Elvis's mother, Gladys, was the spiritual "Peace In The Valley", first recorded by gospel queen Mahalia Jackson in 1939, and the positive response from Sullivan's 55 million viewers prompted RCA to rush their charge into a studio just days later. The result was a four-track EP, released a week before Easter; a slick recording of the TV triumph, augmented by the equally worshipful "I Believe", "Take My Hand, Precious Lord" (also written by Thomas A Dorsey, composer of the lead track) and "It Is No Secret (What God Can Do)".

All would subsequently feature on Presley's third long player, *Elvis's Christmas Album*, at the end of the year. Sequenced after the carols "O Little Town Of Bethlehem" and "Silent Night" on Side Two, they literally showcased another side of the singer, in contrast to the first side's more straightforward festive pop selections. Further illustrations of his faith pepper his entire career – all three of his Grammy awards were for Best Sacred (later renamed Best Inspirational) performances.

"He relied on God for everything, it's where he got his strength," Presley's stepbrother Billy Stanley told press when promoting his 2022 memoir, *The Faith Of Elvis*. "He thanked God every day and constantly sought God's guidance through prayer and reading the Bible." When Stanley was old enough to join the singer's entourage his chief responsibility was to ensure Elvis's personal Bible, littered with hand-scrawled notes in the margins, travelled with him to every show.

The Bible had been a gift from Gladys shortly before her death in 1958, and it never left her son's side during the recording of his first full album of religious songs, *His Hand In Mine* (1960), in a marathon 14-hour session that also spawned future singles "Surrender" and "Crying In The Chapel". The title track and two other numbers, "I Believe In The Man In The Sky" and "Jesus Knows What I Need", had been popularised by Georgia gospel group The Statesman Quartet, whose lead singer Jake Hess he would later single out as a major influence on his own vocal style.

Certainly, there's a controlled grandeur to Presley's voice throughout album, less melodramatic than on his ballad-like pop hits of the same year, "It's Now Or Never" and "Are You Lonesome Tonight?"; a reverential hush to the hymnal "In My Father's House", but a more upbeat, playful tone on the African-American spirituals "Joshua Fit The Battle Of Jericho" and "Working On The Building".

Yet, despite the record's success Presley struggled to convince RCA another religious album would be a good move, and it was seven years – and diminishing returns from a string of half-hearted film soundtracks – before the label green-lit *How Great Thou Art* (1967). Again, Gladys's memory played a part in its recording, the title track a song Elvis recalled her singing to him as a lullaby growing up in Tupelo, Mississippi.

The track leads off a Side One with a distinct focus on church music, the likes of "Somebody Bigger Than You And I" and the traditional "Farther Along", especially, indebted to the choral-like vocal support of The Jordanaires. Held up against some of

CRITICS' VERDICTS

ELVIS' CHRISTMAS ALBUM

"I would have to be forcibly fed to take Presley singing songs of the type listed on the second side. Hardly suprising, he sounds out of his element. But he is right back on the beat with 'Santa Claus Is Back In Town' and 'Santa Bring My Baby Back (To Me)'. These tracks make me wish that Elvis gets another teddy bear for Christmas!"

LAURIE HENSHAW, MELODY MAKER, 14/12/1957

the previous year's inconsequential movie songs ("Petunia, The Gardener's Daughter", "Queenie Wahine's Papaya") it's a monument to sombre reflection, but Side Two finds The King loosening his metaphorical cassock.

"So High" rattles the pews with glee, the bluesy "Where Could I Go But To The Lord?" benefits from Floyd Cramer's elegant piano, while party vibes abound on the call-and-response of "If The Lord Wasn't Walking By My Side". After two soundtracks that failed to reach gold status, the fervour for *How Great Thou Art* saw it certified triple-platinum in the US, earning its maker his first Grammy.

★★★

“I’m never aware of what I’ll do next”

As Elvis is drafted, what lies ahead for him — and his fans? There are sessions in the vault, and NME ponders the possible dawning of a “mature and more durable” phase. Interviewed, Elvis seems sanguine with any outcome. “Even If I stopped singing tomorrow, I’d have no regrets,” he says. “I had a ball.”

BETTMANN/GETTY IMAGES

Private Elvis leaves Brooklyn for Europe, September 1958

ELVIS

NME | 10|1|1958

IN pursuance of the policy of being able to bargain from a position of strength, America inducts an extremely powerful and explosive weapon into her Forces in March. Its name – Elvis Presley. Yes, in exactly 10 weeks' time, the idol of the world's teenagers exchanges his guitar for a rifle, trades his sideburns for a crew-cut, and embarks upon an enforced retirement from show business for two years.

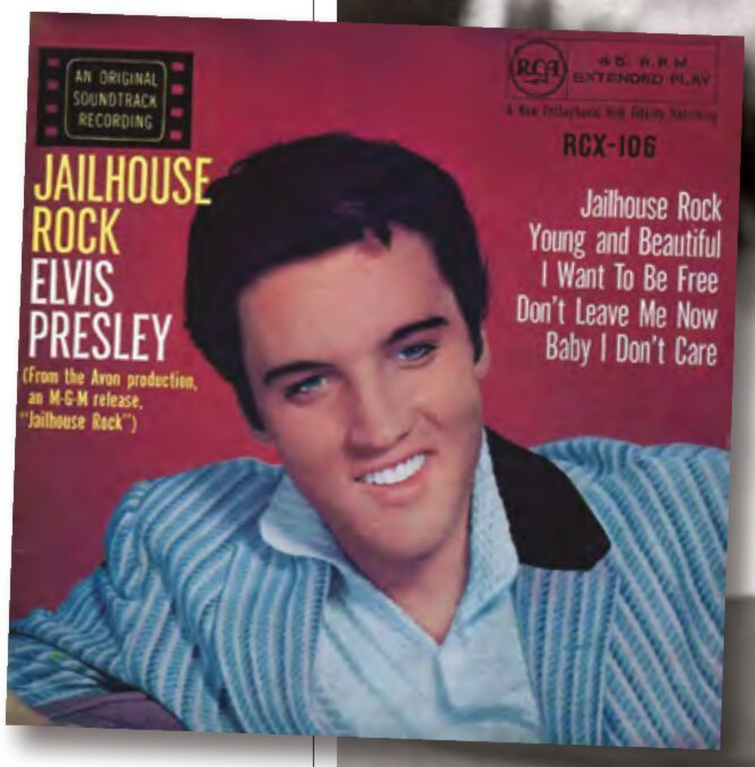
Just what effect will this drafting have upon his popularity and his career? Can he take this lay-off in his stride, and emerge in 1960, once again to shatter our equilibrium, leaping back to the phenomenal success he is now enjoying?

Or will the public, usually so quick to forget, allow their interests to be steered into new and more novel, directions in his absence?

A great deal will depend upon the attitude of the Army authorities in deciding whether he will be permitted to undertake other activities in his off-duty moments. An official spokesman has said that Presley's performances will be restricted to troop concerts and defence-bond rallies.

It has also been suggested that he will not be allowed to make records in his spare time, on the grounds that in the Army there *is* no spare time — a soldier is a soldier for 24 hours every day.

But more recently, indications are that the rigidity of this axiom will be relaxed, as happened in the case of Eddie Fisher, to enable him to cut records – if he is in the vicInity of a studio.



It's not that bad: recording the soundtrack to *King Creole* at Radio Recorders, LA, January 1958

HULTON ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES, MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

Obviously, he will not be retained in a specific area, or even in America itself, solely to enable him to do this.

However, even if Elvis is not in a position to record for the next two years, his company – RCA – will not be unduly worried, for they have been busy stock-piling Presley recordings over the past weeks.

They now have sufficient to ensure that a new Presley record can be issued to the public every two months, while he is in the Forces. It is true, of course, that he will not be in a position personally to exploit the records – on TV, radio and concert appearances as he has done in the past. With any other artist, this may rank as a major obstacle. But with Presley, knowing as we do his potential as a record seller – not to mention the fact that vast quantities of his discs are always ordered long before they have actually been issued to the public – I cannot see this being more than a slight set-back.

Presley is quoted as saying that he is proud to go into the Forces. I regard it as absolutely essential that he should. For so many teenagers look up to him as the symbol, the essence of American youth, even to the extent of modelling themselves upon him, that it could do immense harm were he not to be conscripted.

From his point of view, it may well come as a relief, or respite, from the breathless whirl of activity and frenzy, in which he has been caught up, over these past months.

What will he miss most in the Forces? Doubtless the hero worship. Frankly, I would not like to be in his shoes for the first few weeks during his basic training at Camp Chaffee, Arkansas, for he is bound to come in for a tremendous amount of ragging.

PRESLEY HAS BECOME THE HIGHEST PAID ENTERTAINER THE WORLD HAS EVER KNOWN

Another enormous contrast will be the financial aspect. In two years, Presley has become the highest paid entertainer the world has ever known; he has accomplished more in that brief span than many other artists of international fame have been able to do in a lifetime.

It is difficult to estimate his earnings during those two years, with money pouring in from every conceivable source. But they must be in the region of five million dollars – and that's a

Elvis is sworn into the Army in Memphis, March 24, 1958

conservative estimate. Yet in the next two years, assuming that he remains a private, he will have an earning capacity of approximately 2,000 dollars!

This may not be as great a hardship as it may appear on the surface. Quite apart from the fact that he must, by now, have sufficient cash in his own private vaults to equal that at Fort Knox, other handsome dividends will be be coming in throughout his service.

There will be royalties from his records – from previous issues and from those which RCA will regularly be releasing. A shrewd move on his part produced a special arrangement, whereby his RCA record royalties will be spread over a period of 20 years. So even if he did not earn another penny from show business, he would still be guaranteed a steady income until 1980!

Sales of Presley discs are, in fact, one of the most remarkable and startling developments in the history of the record business. Consider the fact that, in America, he had the best-selling record for 19 of last year's 52 weeks – an unprecedented achievement. What is even more shattering is that, in this age of fantastic record sales, very nearly one-half of the entire sales of pop music in America in 1957 were Presley records!

Here in Britain, a check with RCA (and his former label, HMV) revealed that Presley sales have reached an all-time peak. A glance at the best-sellers lists proves his extreme popularity here – if proof were needed.

According to my calculations, Presley must have sold, during the past two years and on a world-wide basis, something in the region of 100 million records. On each and every one of these discs, he collects a royalty – and a larger cut than that given to most artists, too! Beyond that, Presley has now formed his own music publishing company, with most of the numbers he records emanating from that source.

With these securities, Elvis will not starve in the Forces. But there's more to come. For, during the months ahead, he will be collecting on the box-office receipts from his films.

Presley's latest film, *Jailhouse Rock*, which is being premiered in London next week, is certain to bring him substantial returns. He has already received a salary of 250,000 dollars for making it – but still to come there is the mere detail of 50 per cent of the profits!

And it is safe to assume that for his *King Creole* film (originally entitled 'Sing You Sinners') now in production, equally advantageous terms were agreed.

It is evident, then, that the world will not be allowed to forget Presley in the coming two years. The situation really resolves itself into another problem – would Presley have maintained his status in any event? At the moment, he has climbed to such heights that he is, as it were, sitting astride Mount Everest.

He can't go any higher, and, as we know, there's only one direction to travel from the top. But I believe that he will remain there at the top for a long time to come. When he comes out of the Army, his character and outlook will have changed. So, possibly, will that of the screaming millions who now worship him.

But remember – Sinatra was once surrounded by screaming bobby-soxers, swooning in the aisles. Now that phase has passed, but Sinatra is more solidly established at the top than ever. There is no reason why, being possessed of limitless personality and star quality, Elvis should not pass out of the gimmick-conscious teenage period into a more mature and durable phase. It could well well be that the Army will prove the dividing line between these two stages in the fabulous career of Elvis. **DEREK JOHNSON**

"HE'S STILL GOING TO BE A BIG STAR WHEN HE GETS OUT OF THE ARMY"

A stellar cast share their takes on Elvis

THE stars of 1958 have their say on Elvis's enforced hiatus. "He's got to broaden his style," says Bing Crosby. "Sing a few different kinds of songs..."

JOHNNIE RAY: "Before Elvis Presley, Britain would get an American song maybe six months after the US. But along came Presley and they demanded the release almost simultaneously – and now it's got to be a habit to bring out tunes in both countries almost at the same time."

TOMMY SANDS: "Elvis certainly sends us wild. He sure can sing down-to-earth good old American blues."

JOHNNY DESMOND (the US MGM singer): "When Presley gets out of the army, he is still going to be a big star. Basically he is a creative guy and has great natural talent. He can do anything he sets his mind to in the entertainment business."

WEE WILLIE HARRIS: "Presley is a great showman – he must be to get where he has got, singing what musicians call trash. Yes, he's OK."

PAUL ANKA: "To command such a large following, Elvis Presley must be a great performer. I have great admiration for him, particularly as he has created an entirely original approach to his music"

BING CROSBY: "I think Elvis Presley is a good man and a very good performer. He's got to broaden his style a little and get a lot more variety into his repertoire – sing a few different kinds of songs, instead of just rock'n'roll."

TOMMY STEELE: "It's a common story that I once saw Presley in New York and decided to follow in his footsteps – but it's just a yarn. To suggest that Elvis had anything to do with the pattern of my show is absolutely nonsense."

BUDDY HOLLY: "All of us who have succeeded in the rock'n'roll field in recent years can thank Elvis Presley – for the importance he has given to our kind of music."

JIM DALE: "I have a certain admiration for Elvis Presley, if only for the various voices he uses."

JERRY LEE LEWIS: "You have to include Elvis Presley in any list of great singers in the modern blues style. He is a great performer to see, too."

DICK CLARK (leading US TV disc jockey): "Unquestionably I have more demand to programme Elvis Presley records than any other artist."

Buddy Holly: "Thank you, Elvis"

MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

FEW Americans have ever heard the name Sam Phillips. But in the music and record business here, Phillips is known as the modest, genial man from Memphis, Tennessee, who, practically singlehanded, turned the record industry upside down.

The story starts with a record called "Mystery Train". That was about three years ago. The artist was a young man from Memphis with long hair and long sideburns. His name was Elvis Presley.

The record appeared on Phillips' own label, Sun Records. The record did three things. First, it launched the fabulous career of the most famous rockabilly of them all. Second, it put Sun Records into the big-time firmament of record labels. Third, it started the trend which saw small labels from all parts of the country burst out with bright new talents and hits to the chagrin of major labels.

Sam Phillips' modesty stems from lean years in his "BP" era — Before Presley, that is.

"In those days I was struggling like a lot of other people. I booked bands into the Peabody Hotel in Memphis and I did a good bit of radio work on WRAC in the same town, booking talent, playing records and what not."

The 35-year-old Phillips is a Deep South white man from Florence, Alabama. But, unlike many of his white contemporaries, he has a deep and lasting devotion and respect for Southern Negro blues music.

"It was only a few years ago," he told me, "when a Negro artist in the south who wanted to make a record just had no place to go. Rhythm and blues record men like Jules and Saul Bihari would come down south into Tennessee from the West Coast with a tape recorder and set up a studio in a garage, to record the Negro blues singers of the South. So I set up a studio in 1950 just to make records with some of those great Negro artists.

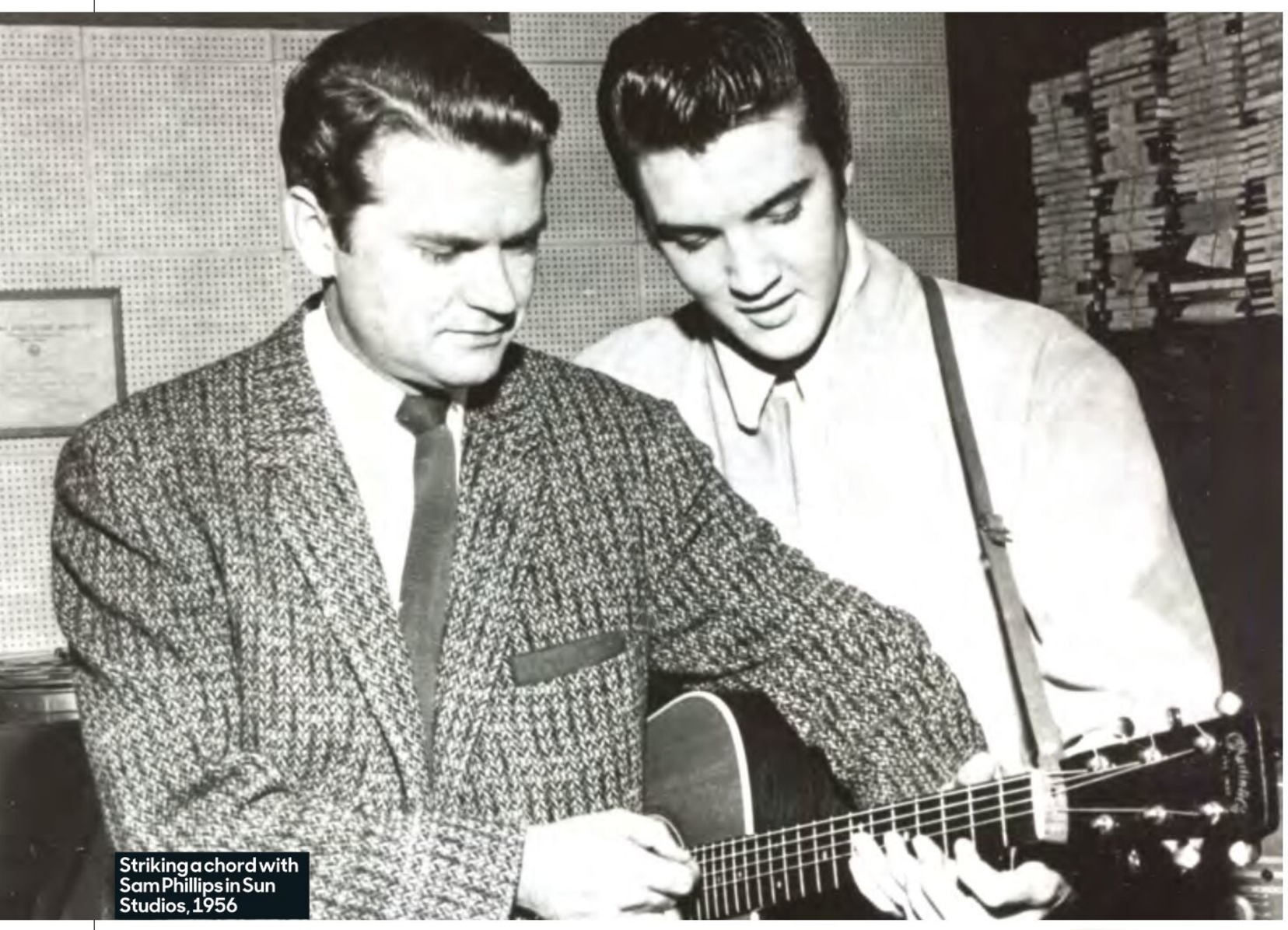
"I made 'Rocket 88' (one of the great rhythm and blues records of the modem era), with Joe Hill Lewis, in my studio. I made records with others, too, like BB King, Howlin' Wolf, Jackie Brenston and Roscoe Gordon. I recorded a quartet of prison inmates called the Prisonaires in a famous record called 'Walkin' In The Rain'."

FINALLY, in 1953, Phillips started his Sun label. One day a youngster walked into the studio and asked if he could audition. He was with his mother. Phillips made some test tapes and, walking out of the control room, he told the lad: "I like what I hear, son."

The singer was Elvis Presley, Phillips recorded Presley with "That's All Right" and "I Forgot To Remember To Forget". The latter, with "Mystery Train", got RCA Victor's country artists and repertoire chief Steve Sholes interested enough to buy.

"But the greatest performer of them all, in my opinion, is Jerry Lee Lewis," Phillips, declared emphatically. "And he is still on my label. I think. Lewis is going to be around for a long, long time and I expect to make many more records with him. He has the most savage, driving blues sound of them all."

The advent of artists like these and the great traditional country blues artist Johnny Cash has given rise to what is known as the "Sun" sound. It's the original and authentic downhome sound, the sound of the blues with the echoey atmosphere of the backwoods, or what still others have called the sharecropper sound. It's the sound that many have imitated and few have accomplished. ***REN GREVATT***


Striking a chord with Sam Phillips in Sun Studios, 1956

THE world's most dynamic and controversial vocal personality — Elvis Presley — has been posted to Europe! He joins an American tank corps in Germany on September 12, as part of his National Service with the US Forces. The comparatively short distance from Britain gives strong hopes to the definite likelihood of him making his first appearances in Britain during his leave while in Germany.

It is significant, too, that Lee Gordon, who has arranged many of Presley's US concerts, is arriving in London this weekend – with the strong possibility that he will be joined here by Colonel Tom Parker, Elvis's personal manager. British fans will eagerly await developments – particularly as dates here would be quite logical for Presley, during leave from Germany.

He has completed his basic training course at the Fort Hood Army base in America; in a few weeks' time, Presley takes advantage of his first leave to record new titles for RCA. The session is scheduled to take place in Nashville, Tennessee.

TIMELINE ARMY SERVICE

The King makes *King Creole* and performs live in Memphis before being drafted into the US Army, his career partly on hold. Tragedy awaits as his beloved mother Gladys dies in August

1958

January – February

Elvis films his fourth movie, *King Creole*. Directed by Michael Curtiz (*Casablanca*) and co-starring Walter Matthau and Vic Morrow.

March

15 He performs two shows in Memphis – his last live gigs until after his 1960 demobilisation.
24 Inducted into the US Army at the Memphis Draft Board and assigned serial number 53310761.
25 Shipped to Fort Chaffee, Arkansas and given his famous GI buzzcut.
29 Private Presley arrives at Fort Hood, Texas for six months of basic training. His parents soon move to a temporary home near the base.

June

10 On leave, Elvis performs his last recording session until 1960.

Down to the wood: Elvis receives his crew cut on his first full day in the US Army

MARK AND COLLEEN HAYWARD/GETTY IMAGES
BETTMANN/GETTY IMAGES

"I JUST DON'T GIVE IT MUCH THOUGHT. I LEAVE THAT TO THE THINKERS"

Elvis answers his critics in *NME*'s Elvis Presley supplement. "Delinquency to me means robbing, knife-fighting and things like that..."

King and hair: getting ready for induction at the Draftee Receiving Depot, Main Street, Memphis, March 24, 1958

NME | 19|9|1958

FOR a youth so normally quiet and polite among strangers, Elvis Presley can be amazingly outspoken when the occasion demands. Below, he's in disarmingly frank mood, as he answers a series of hard-hitting questions on various aspects of his career. His replies cover topics as varied as his critics, his fans. his records, his spare-time activities, his new acting career in films, and his ideas on love and marriage.

Elvis ducks none of the questions, but answers them all honestly and shrewdly.

What do you think of all the criticism that has been levelled at you?
ELVIS: I expect it. It seems to happen every time a newcomer with a new style comes along. Sinatra, Frankie Laine, Johnnie Ray and others went through the same sort of thing. It's nothing new.

Are you aware that certain critics described your stage performances as "indecent"?
Yes, I am. But I don't deliberately do anything. I'm never aware of what I'll do next, so they can't say my movements are planned or rehearsed. After all, I'm singing rock'n'roll, which is a frantic, bouncy kind of music. When I sing a ballad, I sing it differently,

Do you think perhaps that your detractors are inspired by jealousy?
No, they have a right to their opinion. They report a performance the way they see it. I can't argue with that. I don't happen to agree with them, but they have a right to say what they think. A reviewer has a right to praise or criticise any performer. That's one of the risks you run in this business.

Has criticism had a harmful effect on your career?
I had fans long before anyone started rapping my performances. Of course, I wasn't as well known then. To be honest, I just don't give it much thought, I leave that to the thinkers.

How do you feel about singers like Frank Sinatra criticising rock'n'roll?
I guess he has a right to his opinion, but I can't see him knocking it for no good reason. I wouldn't knock Frank Sinatra. I like him very much. If I remember correctly, he was also part of a trend, just like rock'n'roll.

Some critics claim that your music causes juvenile delinquency, What do you say about that?
I don't understand it. Delinquency to me means robbing, knife-fighting and things like that. I've done nothing to cause that and I'd never set up a pattern like that for others to follow.

Some writers have said that your popularity is on the wane. Do you agree?
This is news to me. I haven't noticed any decline. Anyway, you can't stay on top forever. Even If I stopped singing tomorrow, I'd have no regrets. I had a ball while I was there.

So you have no hard feelings about newspapermen?
Heck, no. The press makes entertainers — and the dee-jays, too. If the press didn't write, no-one would know what you're doing. Everyone needs the press.

Do you think a lot about your fans?
I sure do. I always try to conduct my personal life to set a good example for them. I think about this all the time.

How do you feel when the girls scream for you?
Well, I figure that it can't last forever, so I might as well enjoy it while I can.

What is your favourite of all the songs you have recorded?
"Don't Be Cruel".

What was the hardest song for you to sing?
"Jailhouse Rock". It's the hardest of any I have recorded. My tongue practically fell out on this one.

What are the drawbacks of being an important public figure?
I can't roam around like I used to. I can't go to football games or a movie or other public places. I'd get mobbed if I did.

What do you do in your spare time? Do you read much?
I read "Superman" or "Captain Marvel", but I don't get time for much else.

What sports do you go in for?
I don't particularly like baseball, but I enjoy football. I played football myself once. As for boxing, I watch all the big fights on TV.

Who are your favourites?
Sugar Ray Robinson and Rocky Marciano. I know Rocky very well. He was going to teach me how to fight once, but I chickened out of it.

Would you like a role in films as a fighter?
You bet, a singing fighter! As a matter of fact, I'd like to do a straight dramatic movie. I'm betting on an acting career. I'd like to be a good actor. I'm always striving to be natural in front of a camera.

> "'JAILHOUSE ROCK'... MY TONGUE PRACTICALLY FELL OUT ON THIS ONE"
> *Elvis Presley*

Do you study the day's rushes when you make a movie?
I sure do. I always criticise myself in films. When I attend a movie theatre, I leave during the numbers I don't like, then come in again after they're over.

When will you get married?
When I fall in love, I guess. I've felt close to falling in love a couple of times. But I don't care enough for one girl to be identified with her. I prefer to date them all 'til I find the right one.

BETTMANN/GETTY IMAGES

Elvis kisses his mother on the eve of his Army induction (father, Vernon, left)

August

Gladys Presley returns to Memphis where she is hospitalised with acute hepatitis. Elvis is granted emergency leave and arrives in Memphis on August 12. He stays with his mother for the next two days and nights. Shortly after he returns to Graceland to rest, she dies in the early hours of August 14, aged 46. Her body lies in state at Graceland that afternoon. Services are at the Memphis Funeral Home the next day. The Blackwood Brothers sing Gladys' favourite hymns, "Precious Memories" and "Rock Of Ages". She is buried at Forest Hill Cemetery. Heartbroken Elvis never fully recovers.

25 Elvis reports back to Fort Hood.

September

22 Elvis takes the USS Randall to West Germany. He arrives in Bremerhaven on October 1 as a part of the 750-man 32nd Tank Battalion, Third Armoured Division. He is met at the dock by 1,500 fans, five TV news crews and reporters from virtually every European newspaper.

October

1 Stationed in Friedberg, Germany for 18 months, Elvis shares an off-base home with his dad and grandmother.

Private Elvis waves to German fans at Bremerhaven docks

Released: 1958 - 1959 | *Record Label:* RCA VICTOR

COMPILATIONS 1958-1959

While Elvis was taking orders in the military, his own Colonel was keeping him on the public's radar in the charts. | *By* PETER WATTS

WHAT to do with Elvis Presley when he was in the Army? That was the conundrum that faced Colonel Tom Parker, and it's why when Private Presley got a two-week furlough from Fort Hood in June 1958 he was sent straight back into the studio – after buying a new car and getting his hair cut, that is.

Colonel Parker's strategy to keep Elvis relevant relied upon RCA having a string of new singles to be eked out every few months – this would ensure Presley remained in the public eye but wouldn't saturate the market with inferior product. However, after a failed session in February, RCA's cupboard was bare. Work needed to be done.

Presley hit Nashville's RCA Studio B on June 10 at around 10.30pm with a hot band that included Hank Ballard, Chet Atkins, Floyd Cramer and DJ Fontana – but for the first time no Scotty Moore and Bill Black, who had publicly quit after a row over pay. Working until 5am, they cut five frantic sides – four of which would be released over the following 18 months before appearing towards the end of 1959 on one of Presley's most recognisable albums. First to be released was the fantastic "I Got Stung" in October '58. "A Fool Such As I" and "I Need Your Love Tonight" were next, both sides of a No 2 in March 1959. And then came "A Big Hunk O' Love", which went to No 1 in June 1959, a salient reminder of Elvis's monumental selling power and unique talent just as he was on the point of returning to civvy street.

RCA bolstered these singles with a string of compilations. This followed a precedent set by March '58's **Elvis' Golden Records** (RCA VICTOR, 1958) ★★★★★ which collected nine No 1s alongside four B-sides and an album track, each of which was said to have sold one million units. This was something that had never really been tried before – although Johnny Mathis's *Johnny's Greatest Hits* came out four days earlier on Columbia – and sales were good enough for the trick to be repeated another three times through 1959.

There was value in this for fans too. The first track on February 59's **For LP Fans Only** (RCA VICTOR, 1959) ★★★★★ was the Elvis-breaking, myth-making, hip-shaking "That's All Right", recorded way back in 1954, but only previously available on 45 and a rarity outside Memphis. There were also early Sun recordings "You're A Heartbreaker", "I'm Left, You're Right, She's Gone" and August '55's B-side "Mystery Train", a cut so fine it pretty much justifies the entire enterprise on its own.

Alongside these were superior RCA B-sides – the best of which was "My Baby Left Me", an Arthur Crudup number originally released as the flip to "I Want You, I Need You, I Love You". Another highlight is Presley's take on "Shake, Rattle And Roll", although that's mainly down to Scotty Moore's electrifying playing, while the cute Presley co-write "Poor Boy" from the *Love Me Tender* EP is a minor gem. As a collection, it's lean, tight, funky and delivers a punch. This is the Elvis everybody fell in love with.

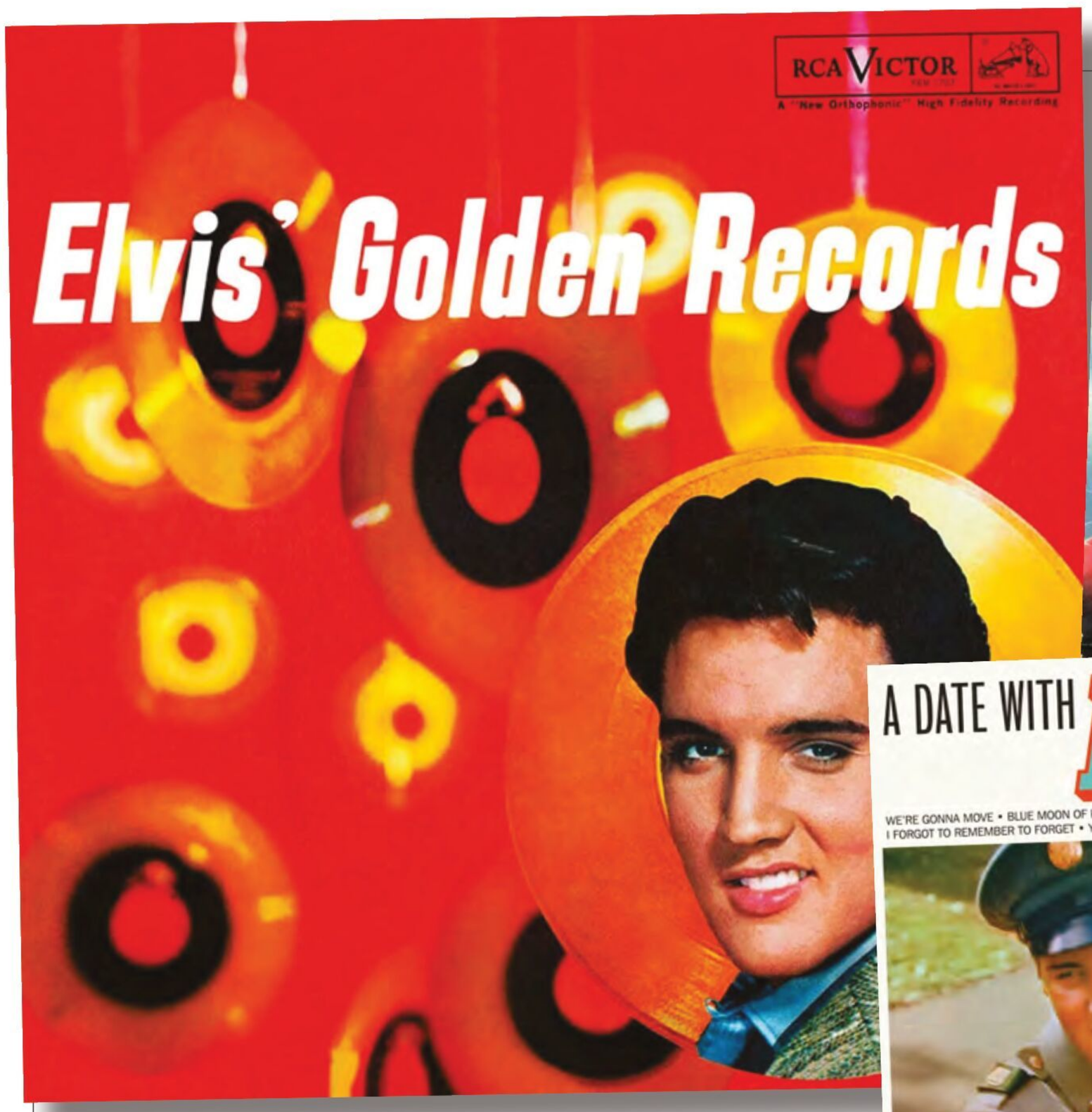
Five months later, RCA tried to repeat the trick with **A Date With Elvis** (RCA VICTOR, 1959) ★★★, which had a grinning, uniformed Elvis on the cover and a calendar on the inner sleeve so lovelorn fans could tick off the days before his return. Here were five more Sun tracks – "Blue Moon Of

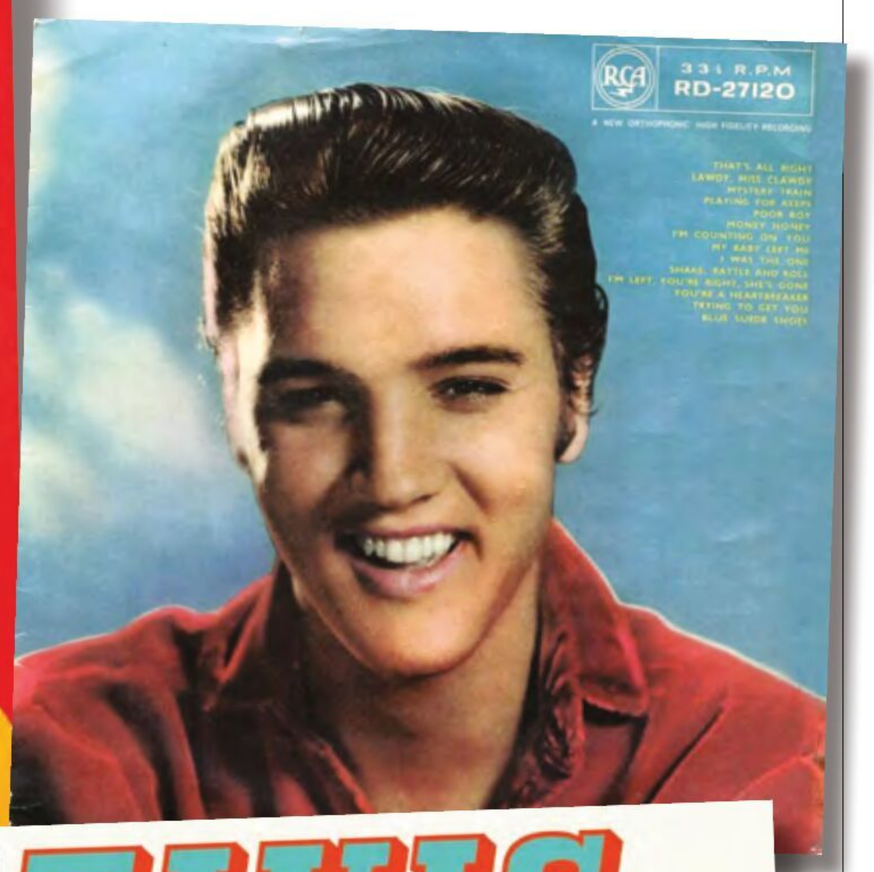
CRITICS' VERDICTS

ELVIS' GOLDEN RECORDS VOLUME 2

"A fine collection of Presley's latest big hits, interspersing the fast, all-out rockers with the more placid rhythm-and-blues ballads. At all times, Elvis keeps a rock-steady tempo, exciting phrasing and his flexible voice, with its considerable range, moves easily from high to low register as the number demands."

ALLEN EVANS, NME, 17/06/1960





★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★

THE SUB-HEADING '50,000,000 ELVIS FANS CAN'T BE WRONG' DIDN'T APPEAR UNTIL 1962

Kentucky", "Milk Cow Blues Boogie", "Good Rockin' Tonight", "I Forgot To Remember To Forget" plus the delirious "Baby Let's Play House", with one of Elvis's greatest rock'n'roll vocals. They were partnered with a couple of Leiber & Stoller sides – the fab "(You're So Square) Baby I Don't Care" and so-so "I Want To Be Free" – plus "Young And Beautiful", "Is It So Strange" and "We're Gonna Move".

IT was a solid selection but slight – barely 20 minutes of music – and garnered worryingly mediocre sales. However, "A Big Hunk O' Love" restored faith in the Presley/Parker axis. The single spent 14 weeks in the charts and was followed in November 1959 by **Elvis' Gold Records, Volume 2** **(RCA VICTOR, 1959)** ★★★★ – an album that became universally known as '50,000,000 Elvis Fans Can't Be Wrong'. That sub-heading didn't appear until 1962, the phrase having been inspired by a critical article in *DownBeat* in September 1956 that lectured, "Fifty million Americans can easily be misled."

Although it's not a patch on *Volume One*, *Volume Two* benefitted from good timing and an unforgettable, much-imitated cover of multiple Elvises in his gold Nudie suit looking simultaneously cheap and spectacular. The record rounded up five singles Presley released in 1958 and 1959 – January 1958's "Don't"/"I Beg Of You" and April 1958's "Wear My Ring Around Your Neck"/"Doncha' Think It's Time" plus all four tracks recorded in that hasty June 10/11 1958 session: "I Got Stung" (plus its stellar A-side "One Night"), "A Fool Such As I", "I Need Your Love Tonight" and "A Big Hunk O' Love" (with B-side "My Wish Came True"). The other Army-era single – "Hard Headed Woman"/"Don't Ask Me Why" – was omitted because it had already appeared on the *King Creole* soundtrack.

These are not the finest 10 songs Elvis ever recorded but it holds together. There's something here for everybody – leg-shaking boogie-woogie ("I Need Your Love Tonight", "Wear My Ring Around Your Neck", "I Beg Of You"), heart-tugging balladry ("Don't", "A Fool Such As I"), a yelping oddball ("Doncha' Think It's Time") and parent-pleasing crooning ("My Wish Came True") – while "I Got Stung", "One Night" and "A Big Hunk O' Love" are three thrilling examples of Elvis's magic touch.

While *Elvis' Gold Records, Volume 2/50,000,000 Elvis Fans Can't Be Wrong* didn't tear up the charts – it sold more than *A Date With Elvis* without breaking the *Billboard* LP Top 30 – it did exactly what the Colonel had anticipated when he draw up his plans in 1958 for the next two years. RCA hadn't been convinced – they offered to fly to Germany to record Elvis there and wanted to shunt out old material that Elvis wasn't happy with – but the Colonel had stood his ground. Appetites were whetted and profits protected before Sergeant Presley's imminent return.

“The army has been real good to me”

As 1959 progresses, the British music press begin the countdown to Elvis’s release from the service. Is he courting? Will he play in England? What of his films? *Melody Maker* makes the trip to Germany to find out: “It’s still surprisin’ the number of parents who think I’m gonna damage their daughters’ morals,” he tells GILBERT KING.

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GI blues: at the castle gate, Bad Neuheim, West Germany, March 1959

NME | 21|8|1959

WITH autumn upon us and winter on its heels, spring won't be long in coming, and Elvis by then will have done his bit for Uncle Sam's Army. He's due out in March, or even earlier, due to the fact that he's taken so little leave during his European service.

One man who is counting the days until Elvis is safely back on American soil, free to do as he pleases, is film producer Hal Wallis, who is discussing that very eventuality with Elvis in Germany now. Hal has his top writers working on a script for Presley's next film, his first in two years, and he is telling Elvis about it. Tentative title is 'Café Europa'.

Wallis produced *Loving You* and *King Creole*, and got very excited with the improvement Elvis made as a film actor in the latter picture.

"I can't wait to get started on his next movie," said Wallis recently. "He has always been a willing pupil, asking me continually how he can improve and imploring me to tell him how he can do things better.

"That's what I like about him – he's got an honest humility that spells greatness. Since *King Creole* he has had many experiences – a heart-breaking sorrow when his mother died; and character building when he had to face up to life as Private Presley, a completely new and rather frightening environment for him.

"He has come through his Army life with flying colours. He went in as a boy; and I think he'll emerge as a man. I have a feeling he can become a really great actor because of it.

"He has proved once again that he has the ability to put everything he's got into anything he does. His rock singing has become tops because of that. I think he can become just as famous as an actor," Mr Wallis concluded.

Elvis hopes so, too. His greatest longing is to be a good actor. He told that to Mr Wallis in 1955, after the noted producer had signed Elvis without ever meeting him. He had seen the young rocker on the Tommy Dorsey television show and was impressed, not so much by the singing, but by the solemn, expressive look in Presley's face.

"I knew somehow that he had star quality for movies," says Wallis today. He contracted Presley the next day – by long-distance telephone to Presley's manager, Colonel Tom Parker.

On their first meeting. Wallis was delighted to find Elvis the opposite of what he imagined. He found him a quiet, polite, modest young man, not a whoopin'-it-up rocker, the impression he gave the public in those days. And Elvis impressed Wallis with his simple statement of fact on that first meeting: "My ambition, sir, is to be a good motion picture actor."

Wallis knows, too, that by being such a model soldier, Elvis has won the respect of millions of older cinemagoers who once thought him a rather worthless sensation-monger. "Elvis has won new respect all over the world," sums up Wallis.

He certainly has. I met a young lady journalist who has spent a few months in Germany, and has twice met Elvis during that time. She has also met many of Presley's fellow soldiers. Her remarks are revealing.

"Elvis took a great deal of ribbing when he first met his fellow-soldiers in Germany," she told me. There was the occasion in the wash-room in the morning. 'Didn't sleep a wink last night,' grumbled one GI. 'Must have been that horror picture they showed us last night.' And then they'd all look at Elvis, knowing the picture was one of Presley's. When Elvis started to laugh and took it well, even the heckler became friendly.

"Presley was always in good humour. None of that mean streak that some soldiers had read about. Once, Elvis picked up a guitar belonging to one of his barrack-mates, left conveniently around for that purpose. He strummed a little and then out came a tune. 'Gosh, he really can play it,' said one of the gang, who had hoped Presley might show himself up by not being able to do so.

"Gradually the ribbing died down then real friendship took its place. From being Presley-baiters they became Presley-boosters, and today you daren't say a thing against Elvis," she said.

As a soldier he has proved tops. You may think because he lives in a private house, with

Jeepster: at the US 3rd Armored Division's HQ, Friedberg, Germany

HULTON ARCHIVE/SUNSET BOULEVARD/CORBIS VIA GETTY IMAGES; BETTMANN/GETTY IMAGES

With producer Hal Wallis and director Michael Curtiz on the set of *King Creole*, 1958

servants, he has it soft, but just listen to this from my friend: "Elvis gets to barracks at seven each morning and helps to polish the floors and tidy up the rooms with the other soldiers.

"Then he starts maintenance on his jeep. He really loves that jeep and won distinction recently when he was one of 15 who got a 'perfect rating' after a searching inspection of over 300 jeeps.

"This brought honour to his outfit and they were not backward about showing their appreciation to him. Not only that, Elvis has various ways of being a good buddy to his Army pals. He has an interest-free loan scheme, helping out any buddy who is short of cash – and never once has he not been paid back on time.

"He also is a great host, usually taking GIs back to his home with him. It's open house at his home in Friedberg. Here they keep the record player in constant use, only stopping it when Elvis sits down at the piano to play and sing for them.

"On Sundays, particularly, Elvis has friends down from the base and if newspapermen call, they are introduced and asked to join the party." My friend from Germany attended one of these Sunday parties and reports that it was a sit-around-and-talk affair, with Elvis doing most of the listening.

Community singing broke up the chatter occasionally, and Elvis sang a solo or two of soft, ballad-type songs. In place of the Jordanaires, who back him up vocally on most of his records, he had some amateurs from the base – but they sounded good, too.

My friend's first impression of Elvis was of a polite, attentive, intelligent young man, on the shy side. "He won my admiration immediately," she said.

She noticed that with people he knew well he was free-and-easy, and quite gay. He was particularly polite and thoughtful with his father and grandmother. In fact, my friend was told by one GI that what impressed him most about Elvis was, "He listens to his father."

That is a big compliment these days, when sons are inclined to think fathers and mothers are "out of touch with the times". But in the Presley household in Germany, before Mr Presley, senior, left for the States, Elvis listened to everything he had to say.

And so the days pass quite swiftly for Elvis. He is on duty from 7am until 5pm weekdays, and till midday Saturday. After that he has a pleasant home life, attending to personal business and giving pleasure to others in equal shares. Occasionally he has to go on manoeuvres – he has another batch of these in November. That means he's away from his base at Friedberg for a week or 10 days, living under war conditions, sleeping out and roughing it.

Like most other GIs he finds no pleasure in this but philosophically accepts it as necessary. He says: "I guess the thing I like least is sleeping out in the snow. It's not something anyone enjoys."

BUT Elvis finds plenty of compensations for this hardship – not the least of which is the warm feeling he enjoys that his fans have not forgotten him. He still receives practical evidence of this with almost every incoming mail, when parcels of cookies, cakes and candies arrive.

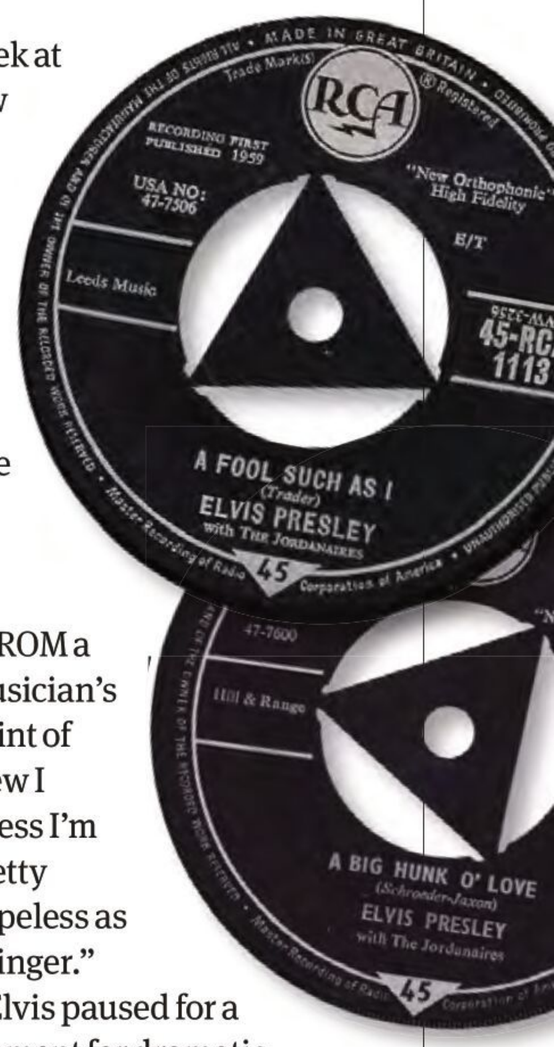
These good things he shares with his barrack-mates and one is on record as saying: "With Elvis around, we never starve. Fact is, we put on weight."

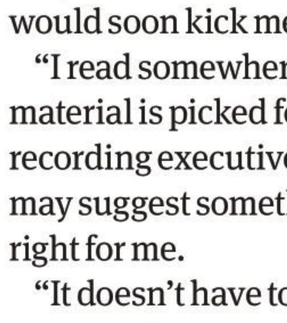
When March comes and Elvis returns to civvy street, he will be able to look back on a job well done, and forward to the renewal of his career, so skilfully kept alive by his recording company, which has consistently kept him in the hit parade by issuing pre-recorded, exclusive material at just the right intervals.

But Elvis hasn't been able to make pictures – so it will be down to Hal Wallis and Hollywood that he'll be making tracks soon after his March release. Of course, he'll be making a new batch of discs, too, and don't believe that he hasn't got material ready. He's been practising hard several times each week at Friedberg, getting new numbers into shape. And mostly rock numbers at that.

So when you read that rock is dead, don't you believe it. With Elvis ready to launch a new offensive — how can it be?

ALLEN EVANS





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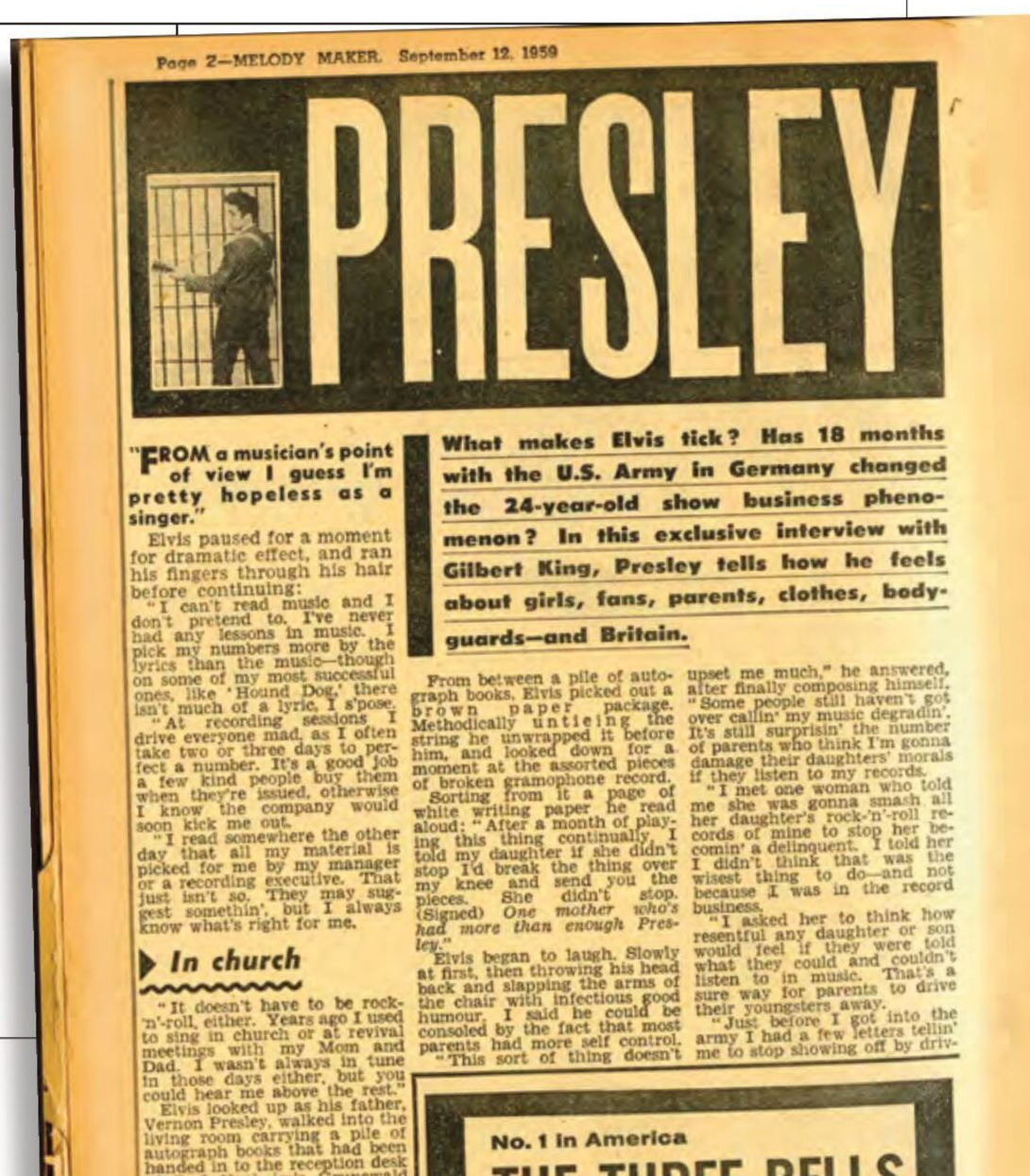
"ELVIS HAS COME THROUGH HIS ARMY LIFE WITH FLYING COLOURS"

Hal Wallis



Page 2—MELODY MAKER. September 12, 1959

PRESLEY

"FROM a musician's point of view I guess I'm pretty hopeless as a singer."

Elvis paused for a moment for dramatic effect, and ran his fingers through his hair before continuing:

"I can't read music and I don't pretend to. I've never had any lessons in music. I pick my numbers more by the lyrics than the music—though on some of my most successful ones, like 'Hound Dog,' there isn't much of a lyric, I s'pose.

"At recording sessions I drive everyone mad, as I often take two or three days to perfect a number. It's a good job a few kind people buy them when they're issued, otherwise I know the company would soon kick me out.

"I read somewhere the other day that all my material is picked for me by my manager or a recording executive. That just isn't so. They may suggest somethin', but I always know what's right for me.

What makes Elvis tick? Has 18 months with the U.S. Army in Germany changed the 24-year-old show business phenomenon? In this exclusive interview with Gilbert King, Presley tells how he feels about girls, fans, parents, clothes, bodyguards—and Britain.

From between a pile of autograph books, Elvis picked out a brown paper package. Methodically untieing the string he unwrapped it before him, and looked down for a moment at the assorted pieces of broken gramophone record.

Sorting from it a page of white writing paper he read aloud: "After a month of playing this thing continually, I told my daughter if she didn't stop I'd break the thing over my knee and send you the pieces. She didn't stop. (Signed) *One mother who's had more than enough Presley.*"

Elvis began to laugh. Slowly at first, then throwing his head back and slapping the arms of the chair with infectious good humour. I said he could be consoled by the fact that most parents had more self control.

"This sort of thing doesn't upset me much," he answered, after finally composing himself. "Some people still haven't got over callin' my music degradin'. It's still surprisin' the number of parents who think I'm gonna damage their daughters' morals if they listen to my records.

"I met one woman who told me she was gonna smash all her daughter's rock-'n'-roll records of mine to stop her becomin' a delinquent. I told her I didn't think that was the wisest thing to do—and not because I was in the record business.

"I asked her to think how resentful any daughter or son would feel if they were told what they could and couldn't listen to in music. That's a sure way for parents to drive their youngsters away.

"Just before I got into the army I had a few letters tellin' me to stop showing off by driv-

In church

"It doesn't have to be rock-'n'-roll, either. Years ago I used to sing in church or at revival meetings with my Mom and Dad. I wasn't always in tune in those days either, but you could hear me above the rest."

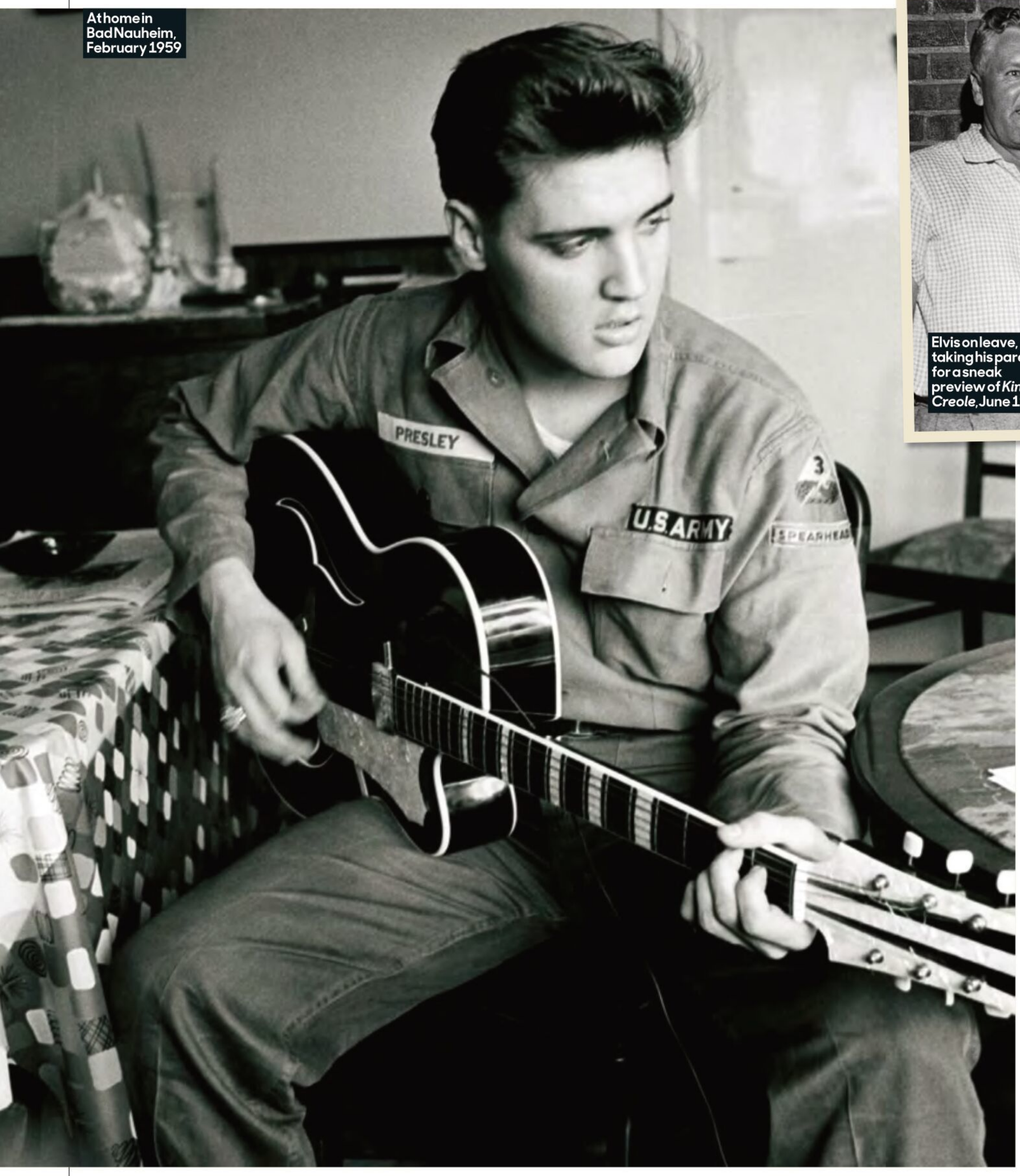
Elvis looked up as his father, Vernon Presley, walked into the living room carrying a pile of autograph books that had been handed in to the reception desk

No. 1 in America

THE THREE BELLS

"FROM A MUSICIAN'S POINT OF VIEW I'M PRETTY HOPELESS AS A SINGER"

Elvis Presley



At home in Bad Nauheim, February 1959

Elvis on leave, taking his parents for a sneak preview of *King Creole*, June 1958

"I didn't shake when I sang in those days, though," he began again, with a laugh. "Maybe 'cause it didn't seem to go with the music.

"The only time I've ever been really upset in my career was when at one time they started censorin' me on TV. They wouldn't let me move for a couple of performances. Can you imagine that? I just about died! I told 'em I didn't care about the people who said I was immoral in my movements. I can't stand still while singin' a song – it just ain't me – and I'll never do it again.

"If I tried to make it on my voice and gee-tar playing alone, I'd be back drivin' a truck in Memphis at 35 dollars a week. Why, if I can't move my left leg I might as well be dead. I have to put everythin' into a performance or I don't feel I'm givin' the people enough.

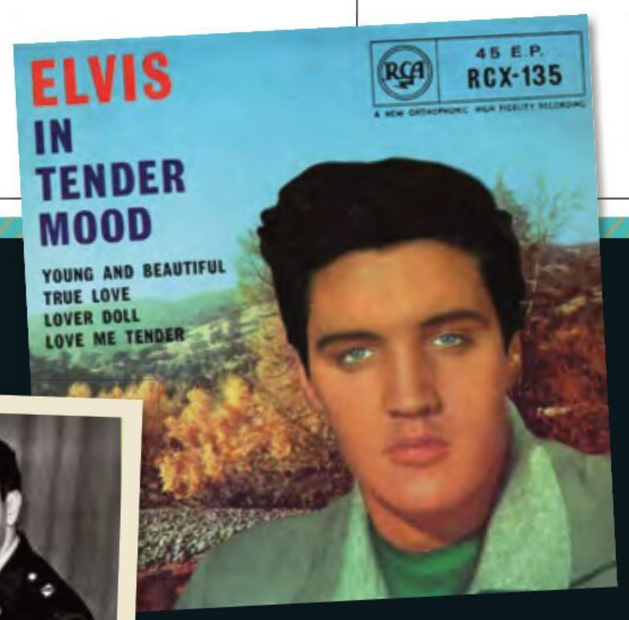
"A doctor once told me I used up more energy in a 30-minute performance than a labourer does in an eight-hour day. You know, once I passed out cold after a performance. The doctors suggested a three-day rest, but I had dates to play and you can't disappoint people like that and give 'em their money back."

From between a pile of autograph books, Elvis picked out a brown paper package. Methodically untieing the string he unwrapped it before him, and looked down

meetings with my mom and dad. I wasn't always in tune in those days either, but you could hear me above the rest."

Elvis looked up as his father, Vernon Presley, walked into the living room carrying a pile of autograph books that had been handed in to the reception desk of Bad Nauheim's Grunewald Hotel that day.

With a "Thanks, Dad," he set them before him and, studying each one carefully, started signing.



TIMELINE — LOVE AND LEAVE

Transatlantic interviews, the wonders of amphetamines, Colonel Tom in control, Army leave in Paris, karate lessons and love at first sight with Priscilla...

1959

January

8 Elvis celebrates his birthday with a transatlantic phone interview with Dick Clark for his *American Bandstand* television show.

March of Dimes poster child, Germany, January 1959

February

According to Guralnick, it's at this time that Elvis is introduced to amphetamines. He is "evangelical" about their energising and slimming effects.

April – May

Colonel Parker keeps Elvis's career booming despite his absence with a string of canny promotional deals.

June

16 On two-week leave, Elvis heads to Paris. His relaxed

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The ladykiller on Army furlough, Edelweiss Hotel, Munich, Germany, June 1959

for a moment at the assorted pieces of broken gramophone record. Sorting from it a page of white writing paper, he read aloud: "After a month of playing this thing continually, I told my daughter if she didn't stop I'd break the thing over my knee and send you the pieces. She didn't stop. (Signed) One mother who's had more than enough Presley."

Elvis began to laugh. Slowly at first, then throwing his h ead back and slapping the arms of the chair with infectious good humour. I said he could be consoled by the fact that most parents had more self-control.

"This sort of thing doesn't upset me much," he answered, after finally composing himself. "Some people still haven't got over callin' my music degradin'. It's still surprisin' the number of parents who think I'm gonna damage their daughters' morals if they listen to my records.

"I met one woman who told me she was gonna smash all her daughter's rock'n'roll records of mine to stop her becomin' a delinquent. I told her I didn't think that was the wisest thing to do – and not because I was in the record business.

"I asked her to think how resentful any daughter or son would feel if they were told what they could and couldn't listen to in music. That's a sure way for parents to drive their youngsters away.

"Just before I got into the army I had a few letters tellin' me to stop showing off by driving around in my Cadillacs, chasin' girls and givin' riotous parties through the night. Somehow I'd like you to make this clear to everyone you can. There never have been any big parties at my place, not even before my mom died. Most of my time at home was spent restin' after tours and makin' movies. As for girls – I like 'em. But I've never had time to date many.

"So OK, my picture is taken with dozens of girls I meet for a short while. And when they print all these pictures across a page in a magazine, maybe it looks as if I'm tryin' to be a lady killer. As for Cadillacs! Cars are one of my weaknesses, I guess. When I was a kid I'd sit out on the porch and watch those long, low cars flash by. One of these days, I told myself, when I got growed up, I'm gonna have two Cadillacs.

"Well, I done better than that. At last count there were five different makes. Probably a psychiatrist could get a lot out of the fact that back home I don't keep them in the garage, but I leave them outside in the driveway of our home so everyone can see.

"I guess it's my way of sayin' to people who said I wouldn't get anywhere – and there were a few – 'This kid didn't do too badly.' I know I'm lucky, darn lucky, but I've done a heap of work for it too. It sounds ungrateful though if I say some of the things that were wonderful about it don't feel quite so wonderful any more. After the first few dozen times it's not so easy to stand and let people strip the clothes off you.

"How has all the adulation affected me? Well, I've changed in quite a few ways. My clothes are a little more conservative, for a start. I don't wear my white leather jacket as much as I used to. Can't remember the last time I looked at that pink satin mandarin type shirt and the shiny loafers with the orange leather insets.

"I've got a lot more plainer clothes now. I'm growing up, I guess. After all, I'm 24 now. You outgrow a lot of things. Luxurywise, I don't think I live too high off the hog. I bought my parents a nice home, but after my mom died I asked Dad to come over to Germany so I could see more of him. There are the cars, I guess, but I've left them back in Memphis.

"When I started makin', money I didn't find a sudden taste for night clubs or high-class restaurants. When I was a kid we could never afford steak, and later on when I could, I never went mad about it. I much prefer hamburgers and fried chicken, or banana and peanut butter sandwiches.

"Oh, I forgot. We had a pool put in back home, which could be called luxury, but we seldom use it. The place is surrounded by railings to keep sightseers out, but it doesn't stop 'em lookin' in, and the family get kinda self-conscious goin' swimmin' with a crowd of people always watchin'.

"The people who live on Audubon Drive, near us, grouped together once and asked to buy our house so they could get rid of the continual line of fans, and have some peace and quiet. When my dad told me about it, I said: 'Why didn't you ask them what they wanted for all their houses, and I'd have bought the lot.' But when I finish with the Army, we'll probably get a farm somewhere where we won't bother anybody, and put up a high wall around it.

"One way I haven't changed is over girls. I keep reading I'm going steady with this and that person. The only time I'll go steady with a girl is if it's the real thing. That's different. Otherwise, going steady just for the sake of going steady, is out.

"My favourite singers?" he echoed. "Still the same – Frank Sinatra, Dean Martin and Fats Domino. And I still love that number 'You'll Never Walk Alone'.

"I don't get mad as often as I used to. Maybe that's because it's been some time since I performed anywhere, so it's some time since I've been called disgustin'. I don't know how many times or ways I can explain that I don't think I behave vulgar when I sing. I just can't get the beat if I stand still.

"What really makes me burn though, is

"THE ONLY TIME I'VE BEEN REALLY UPSET WAS WHEN THEY STARTED CENSORIN' ME"

Elvis Presley

trip includes visits to the Folies Bergère and the Lido nightclub. During a drunken night at the Lido, Elvis gets up and sings "Willow Weep For Me", his first public performance in 15 months.

August

Captain Joseph Beaulieu is transferred from Texas to Weisbaden Air Force Base. He is accompanied by his wife and children, including his 14-and-a-half- year-old stepdaughter, Priscilla Ann. Currie Grant, a friend of Elvis, spots her in the Eagle Club – a community centre for Forces families – and tells her that she knows Elvis and invites her to a party at the star's home. Her parents reluctantly agree, imposing an 11pm curfew. Elvis is immediately smitten.

Autumn

Elvis and Priscilla see each other almost every night, though the relationship is chaste. Elvis wants her to remain "pure".

December

Elvis begins karate lessons with Jürgen Seydel, the "father of German karate".

Press conference, Paris, June 17, 1959

MARK AND COLLEEN HAYWARD/GETTY IMAGES; BETTMANN/GETTY IMAGES

when critics take it out on the audience. I can take anything they have to say, but when they pick on the people who've put me where I am, I really get hot."

The world's highest paid entertainer cleared his throat and, bringing his legs up on to the couch, curled up into a ball. I asked him if he ever missed the continual round of tours and audiences very much now. "So much, so much," he answered softly; "This is going to sound kinda corny, but I only completely come to life when I'm out on a stage, performing. I always think they don't like me unless they start screaming.

"Once I played a night club in Las Vegas and it was terrible. There were none of the kids there as they couldn't afford the prices and, to me, the audience seemed practically dead. I love applause, but it's not enough if it's not backed up with some other kind of enthusiasm. I'd rather people throw things at me instead of just sitting there. Some guys do, sometimes.

"It was never unusual, off-stage, for fellas to want me to fight them. Some jealousy is only natural, I guess. Maybe if I was them and my girl kept goin' crazy over some character, I'd feel the same. But, to be on the safe side, I took bodyguards with me. Sounds like Chicago in the twenties, doesn't it?

"The Army has been real good to me in this way, too. When I first arrived in Germany, they assigned two MPs to help keep me in one piece. Really. I have a much freer life now. I know the mobbin' is always the same wherever I go, but I have my evenings free quite a bit now where I never did before.

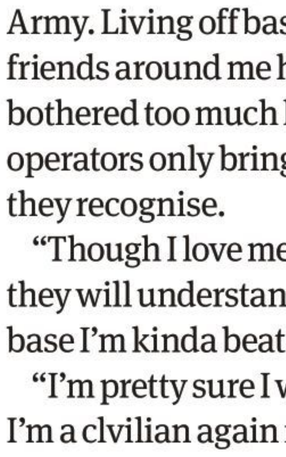
"Of course, there are always requests for interviews, but I've made it clear I can't spend all my time talkin' to the Press. There are so many of them."

Making an open steeple of his two hands. Elvis patted his thumbs and fingers against one another. "So really I'm enjoying myself in the Army. Living off base and having my dad and friends around me helps a lot. And I'm not bothered too much here as the elevator operators only bring people to my floor whom they recognise.

"Though I love meeting my fans, I know you and they will understand that after a hard day at the base I'm kinda beat when I get home.

"I'm pretty sure I won't be doing any shows 'til I'm a clvilian again next year. But when I am, one of the first things I want to do is play to a British audience and get to know some of the people who write to me from England.

"The only trouble is, when I meet the fans I often get kinda carried away. When some of the girls rush up and hug and kiss me I've been known to kiss them right back. Do you think the English girls would mind that?" ***GILBERT KING***


PRESLEY RICHARD
MUSICAL EXPRESS
AMORE MIO
NME | 23|10|1959

ELVIS PRESLEY is a new man! He's lost his sideburns, and he's knocked about 12 pounds off that tall, handsome frame. He's tougher, harder and leaner. He even has a new sense of humour. And he's definitely more mature.

That's what Hollywood producer Hal Wallis has found out. Wallis has just returned to California after several weeks in Germany. He spent the time making location shots for a new picture, *GI Blues*. It'll be the first movie starring Elvis when he finishes his military tour of duty next year. It'll definitely accent Elvis's "new look."

"Elvis is a young boy who's just growing up. And I can see the influence the military has had on him," Hal Wallis told me.

He spent his days working on the film – and his evenings talking to Elvis about his military duty and about his return to civilian life next year. "Elvis has become more mature because this is a different kind of life from anything he's known previously. He has a keen sense of humour, and that's developed along with his career as a soldier," Wallis added.

Now here's a man who's really in a position to know about the changes in Elvis. He produced the singer's final film before E lvis popped into a uniform, the hit picture, *King Creole*. He thinks so much of the new- and-improved Elvis that he has him under contract for five more films to be made in the next five years. Not only that, but he's spending two million dollars to produce *Gl Blues* and show this better-than-ever Elvis to his fans all over the world.

At Frankfurt, Wiesbaden, Friedberg, and Idstein-on-the-Rhine – all familiar locations to Elvis – Wallis has been taking background footage for the new film. But Elvis hasn't appeared in any of the shooting and hasn't even watched it being done. "We don't want any criticism that he's working in a commercial film – even on his own time," Wallis explained. "The choice was ours, I think if we had asked the Army for him, we could have had him."

Meanwhile, about 100 of Elvis's companions in uniform, from the Third Armored Division, to which Elvis belongs, earned as much as $10 extra a day for three weeks, by playing themselves, American soldiers, for the new film.

To 24-year-old Pfc T W Creel, of Laurel, Mississippi, went the great job of playing Elvis's double. Tall, lanky Creel resembles Elvis from a distance, and has that same hip-swinging walk.

"I met Elvis only once," Creel said. "And I figure him for a pretty nice guy. It's pretty well an honour to double for him. Presley plays some good music. You know, there's different music for different moods. Well, his strikes me as the music for getting a kick out of life. If you enjoy life, you enjoy Presley."

Wallis agrees with those comments – and he figures the public is going to like the new Elvis, *sans* sideburns, even better.

"The fact that he's done nothing but be a soldier for two years, no concerts, no personal appearances, and that he's been such a good soldier, means people miss him and will be glad to see him again. I'm sure he'll be a big success."

The new film concerns some lonely American GIs in Germany and tells about the girls they find

"Don't mess around with me": performing "Trouble" in *King Creole*

SUNSET BOULEVARD/CORBIS VIA GETTY IMAGES

Sgt Elvis shows off his stripes, 1959

abroad. A French, a German and an Italian girl share the honours with Elvis and his soldier pals.

When Elvis leaves the Army on March 23, he'll take a few weeks to rest. And then he'll go right before the cameras again. So you can count on viewing *GI Blues* next autumn.

"The music is different this time – not just rock'n'roll," Wallis said. "In one scene there's a puppet show, and the record supplying music breaks down. Then Elvis takes over and sings the melody."

Elvis' leading lady hasn't been picked yet, so the big chance is still open for the right girl. Wallis had considered Rosana Podesta for the Italian part and Nadja Tiller as the pretty German – but both are expecting babies and are unavailable to play. Wallis also considered Elvis's heaviest romance in Germany, the German actress Vera Tchechova. "But she's not the type for this picture," he said.

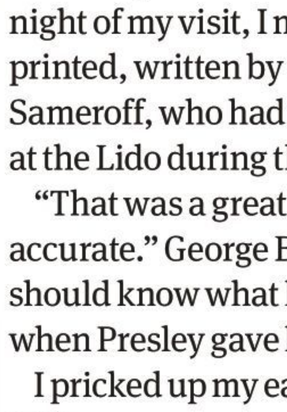
Wallis, who's called the "star maker" because he's produced a constant series of hits in his 25 years as a movie-maker, has dealt with plenty of temperament in his time — but not from Elvis.

"Elvis is a perfectionist and wants to do the best he possibly can – that's true when he makes films and I'm sure it's true of his career in the military. I've seen him do as many as 20 takes on a song before he's satisfied with it," he added. "He'll come out of his military career looking lean and hard and good – he's even handsomer now," Wallis finds.

There may be just one minor change, Wallis laughs. "His rhythm will probably have a regimented beat now, as a result of his military training."

HAZEL GUILD

Elvis and The Blue Belles at the Lido nightclub, Paris, June 17, 1959



NME | 4|12|1959

PRESLEY has entertained in public during his stay in Europe. At one very special performance. But not for generals or diplomats during some high-class function at an embassy. Not for fans in some obscure German jazz club. Not for buddies in a mess hall. But in the most unusual place, in the most unique circumstances. And his performance introduced a new Elvis.

I discovered about Presley's show when I visited Paris recently and looked up my friends George and Bert Bernard, the kings of record-miming, whose latest take-off includes a hilarious Yul Brynner and Deborah Kerr in *The King And I*.

They starred at the Lido Club for a year, ending their long and successful season recently. On the night of my visit, I mentioned the article we had printed, written by Glaswegian Lawrence Sameroff, who had met Presley and The Bernards at the Lido during the summer.

"That was a great piece, very interesting and accurate." George Bernard commented. "But you should know what happened a night or so after, when Presley gave his concert."

I pricked up my ears. This is what George told me:

"Elvis came in several nights running while he was on holiday in Paris in June. We got quite friendly. I was amazed at the boy, because I had always thought of him as the complete 'end' for the reason that I didn't dig his rock'n'roll and his hip-swinging sickened me.

"I have a daughter, Alice, who is now 16 and has been a Presley fan for three years. Maybe I was jealous that she liked him so much. Anyway, Presley was a no-score in my book – until I met him.

"Then I found a gentleman, as polite as you could ever wish to meet and as charming as a prince," he went on. After our second show one night, he said he'd wait till Bert and I got changed and then we'd go on somewhere for a coffee (Elvis never drinks alcohol).

"When I left my dressing room I heard a piano playing softly, swingly, soothingly. I stopped and listened. It reminded me of George Shearing. Then a voice started to sing, so quietly, the tune being played on the plano. A soft bluesy number called 'Willow Weep For Me'. I had to see who was singing. I never expected it to be Elvis Presley – but it was!"

AND surrounding him, some standing, some leaning on the piano, some sitting on the floor, were the waiters, cleaners, commissionaires, charwomen, bus boys and all who go to make up the large staff of the Lido Club.

They were getting – for nothing – what no-one else in Europe could get for a fortune, a show from Elvis. "But it

MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGE; DALMAS/SIPA/SHUTTERSTOCK

"HIS RHYTHM WILL PROBABLY HAVE A REGIMENTED BEAT NOW, AS A RESULT OF HIS MILITARY TRAINING" *Hal Wallis*

wasn't the Elvis we know on records: This was a suave, sophisticated songster at the piano, making magic at the keyboard, and singing in a soft, well-modulated, superbly controlled voice.

"Elvis sang for about half a hour, a dreamy, contented expression on his face. He was enjoying himself. He nodded as his listeners applauded quietly at the end of each number, going into the next almost immediately.

I was impressed by two facts: Elvis has a really fine singing voice, not quite Sinatra, but definitely Sinatra-ish; and he is a very fine pianist Indeed. This surprised me, because I didn't even know he played the piano.

"Later I asked Elvis why he had played and sung on the spur of the moment. He replied quite simply: 'I had the urge. I play quite a bit back in my home in Germany, singing at the piano. Guess being in Paris I missed my piano and when I saw that one on the stage there I couldn't resist it'."

George Bernard went on to ask Elvis a very pertinent question. "Having heard you sing so well at the piano, why do you bother with rock'n'roll in pictures and on discs?" Elvis answered: "I have a lot of fans who like me rocking. I like rocking, too. So we have a good time. When they want me singing softer ballads — I'm ready. 'Til then, I go on rocking."

Fair enough, isn't it? No wonder George Bernard ended by saying: "Yes, I really like Elvis. He's no beatnik kid, he's a sensible, intelligent young man, a credit to the showbusiness world I've lived in most of my life."

Coming from such a great trouper as George Bernard, that is praise indeed for Elvis Presley.

ANDY GRAY

The 16-year old Priscilla Beaulieu is led away by a military policeman while trying to say goodbye to her friend Elvis at Frankfurt Airport, March 2, 1960

ELVIS PRESLEY treated me to one of his smouldering, heavy-lidded glances and the corner of his mouth curled into a faint smile. "I don't know if I shall manage to get to the top again," he said. "I only wish I did know. I hear that trends have changed, so it might be pretty difficult for me. But I'll tell you this – I'm gonna try hard."

I was talking to Elvis in the Ray Barracks, Friedberg, some 30 miles north of Frankfurt, just before the singing phenomenon flew back to America this week for his discharge from the Army. This was the first time Elvis had been able to speak freely since his arrival in Europe – and I was there on behalf of the *NME*.

When I asked him about the future, he was extremely cautious – and a little apprehensive. "I'm completely away from showbusiness," he told me. "I only have newspaper clippings to keep me up to date with what's going on. That's where the *NME* comes in very useful – I get it regularly... every week."

Elvis went on to say that even if he doesn't zoom back on to his pedestal he had absolutely no regrets about the way things have turned out. He thought that Army life had been an invaluable experience, he'd made a lot of friends in the process and he wouldn't have missed it for anything.

As he was a little uncertain about public reaction to his comeback, I reminded Elvis that *NME* readers had voted him the World's Outstanding Singer and Musical Personality in our annual poll.

"Sure that was just wonderful," he enthused. "It was just about the best omen I could have for the future. I must say the result came as a complete surprise to me – I could hardly believe it seeing that I've been out of circulation for two years. I'd have understood it if I'd been bottom of the list."

And to prove his gratitude Elvis borrowed my pen and wrote a message to all *NME* readers.

It occurred to me that Elvis might be particularly concerned about the new crop of singers, who'd sprung up into the limelight in his absence. So I asked what he thought of his new rivals, like Fabian and Frankie Avalon.

"Well to start with, I don't consider them as rivals," he explained. "I've always believed that there's room for everyone in showbusiness – and if other people can make it, then good luck to them. I've been down the same road they're walking on now, and I don't begrudge them their success one bit."

This seemed an opportune moment to ask Elvis about our own British singers – if in fact he'd ever heard of any of them. I was delighted to find he was quite well-informed on this subject.

"I know the names of a lot of British singers," he assured me. "Like I said, I get the *NME* regularly. And there are one or two I've been fortunate enough to hear – I want to tell you you've got a mighty promising bunch of boys there."

Elvis singled out Cliff Richard, Marty Wilde and Tommy Steele as the three British names with whom he is specially familiar and whose records he has heard.

Presley's immediate plans on discharge are to go home and take a short rest, before starting work with Frank Sinatra on the television spectacular he is doing at the beginning of May – and the film, *GI Blues*, which he is scheduled to make.

He has no definite recording plans, although he assumes that making new discs will be one of the

TIMELINE

HONOURABLE DISCHARGE

Sgt Elvis leaves West Germany and heads back to the States. He is discharged from the Army and resumes recording. He guests on a Sinatra TV special...

1960

January

20 Elvis is promoted to the rank of Sergeant.

March

1 Elvis gets set to leave West Germany. After a press conference at Ray Barracks in Freidberg, he bumps into Sun Records' Marion Keisker, now an Air Force Captain. He greets her warmly and it marks the first and only time he'll acknowledge the part she played in his rise.

3 Sergeant Presley stops off at Prestwick airport in Scotland on his way back to the States. The 90-minute stopover marks his only ever visit to Britain.

Demob happy: Elvis meets his fans in Prestwick, Scotland, March 4, 1960

POPPERFOTO VIA GETTY IMAGES/GETTY IMAGES; BETTMANN/GETTY IMAGES

Press conference at Fort Dix, NJ, following his arrival from Germany, March 1960

"IT WON'T BE TOO DIFFICULT TO ADJUST MYSELF FROM 108 DOLLARS A MONTH TO ABOUT A MILLION PER YEAR" *Elvis Presley*

first items on his schedule. "I haven't had a new record out for 10 months, and that's taking a big risk," he said.

I pointed out that doubtless RCA had a pile of material up their sleeves in readiness for his return. "Maybe so, "but I've got some stuff too," he revealed. "A lot of my material in the past has consisted of songs submitted by amateur writers. And in the last couple of years I've collected quite a few tapes I'm interested in."

Will it be difficult for Elvis to settle down in civvy street? "Well, I guess it won't be too difficult to adjust myself from 108 dollars per month to about a million per year," he grinned. "But I suppose it won't be too easy readjusting to the entire life."

Elvis said that he missed the entertainment business very much – even though he had enjoyed his Army service. And a little earlier the army confirmed what they thought of Sergeant Presley by awarding him a certificate of achievement. It cited Elvis for the initiative and level-headedness that he had shown as leader of a scout platoon and praised his continually outstanding performance of duty – plus the personal example he always set to fellow soldiers.

Said Captain Marn at the Ray Barracks, "He has set an exceptionally high standard which any other star name coming into the Army will find exceedingly difficult to follow."

After all this praise it seemed appropriate to ask Elvis if he had considered re-enlisting. "No sir," he chuckled.

I was most anxious to know if Elvis intended to go back onto the rigid rock'n'roll path. Didn't he perhaps consider that he was getting too old for a rocker?

"Well, I don't know – that's the first time I've ever been asked that question. But I don't think so – I'm not an old man yet!

"I can tell you this – my attitude to rock hasn't changed one bit and it would be a mistake for me to change my style. The public will let me know in due course if they don't like it.

"I would like to develop my acting to some extent, though. You know, like Sinatra did when he suddenly came up with *From Here To Eternity*. I certainly couldn't pattern myself on Frank but I admire him very much and that's the sort of thing I'd like to do."

What about Elvis's movements, which have come in for a great deal of criticism in the past? "I know they shocked a lot of people, but they were all spontaneous, I just couldn't help the way I presented my songs – I guess it was just a part of me."

And those celebrated sideburns? "I'll let them grow again a little, but they won't be as long as they were. I reckon I got over that kick!"

Elvis confirmed to me that he is definitely contemplating visiting Britain next year, as part of a lengthy tour of Europe. "It'll be completely new territory for me, and I'm really looking forward to it," he declared.

Has he lost weight since he's been in the Army?

"Yes, about 10 pounds. I tip the scales at about 170 now."

Any thoughts on getting married?

"I don't know yet. I guess I'll wait until the bug bites – and it hasn't bitten yet."

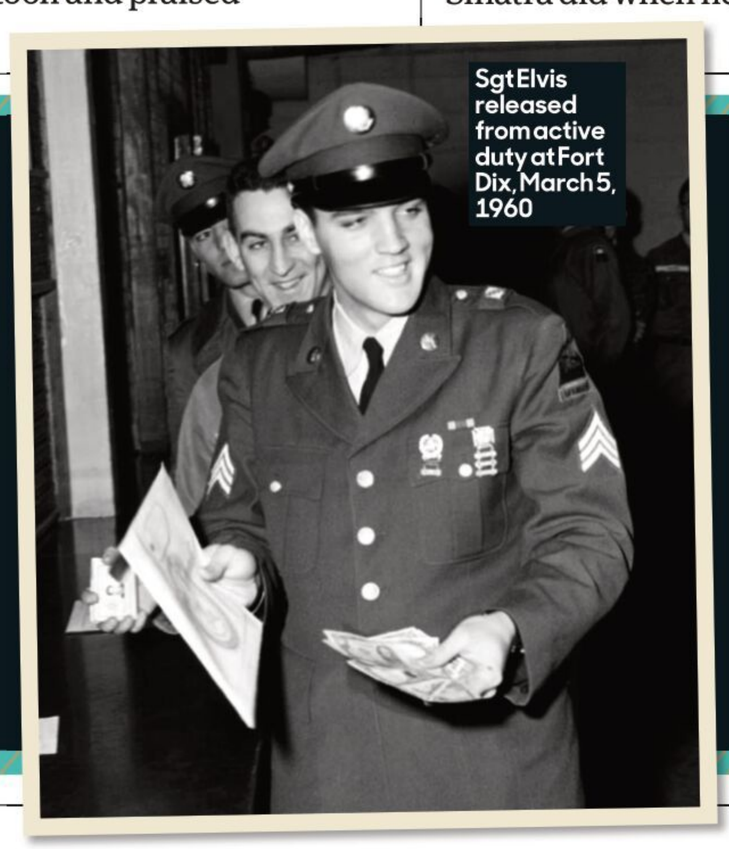
Has he sung at all while he's been in Germany?

"Only for the guys in my platoon."

Is he taking any souvenirs back to America?

"Two German guitars and a camera."

By now, Elvis Presley is back in America. And he's taken with him the best wishes of all *NME* readers, which I delivered on your behalf. What's more, I can assure you that he was genuinely pleased to receive them. **DEREK JOHNSON**



Sgt Elvis released from active duty at Fort Dix, March 5, 1960

5 Elvis is officially discharged from the US Army.
8 He holds a press conference at Graceland to talk about his service and love of karate.
20 Elvis has his first post-Army recording session, spawning "Stuck On You".
26 He tapes a "Welcome Home Party" special for Frank Sinatra's ABC-TV variety show, for which he is paid a record $125,000. Frank sings "Love Me Tender" while Elvis covers "Witchcraft". When the show airs on May 8, it achieves a 41.5 per cent national audience share.

Frqnk Sinatra welcomes back Elvis after his stint in the Army on his self-titled TV show, March 26, 1960

CORBIS/CORBIS VIA GETTY IMAGES; MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES

Released:	APRIL 8, 1960	SEPTEMBER 23, 1960	Record Label:	RCA VICTOR

ELVIS IS BACK! /GI BLUES

The demobbed Elvis returns to the studio. Crucial territorial gains are made, but schmaltziness proves a wily foe. | *By* ANDREW MUELLER

THE return of a soldier from service is always a big moment for those who love them. However, these are usually intimate occasions for family and friends, rarely attracting reporters, photographers, newsreel cameras, shrieking fans, record company executives or Nancy Sinatra. The discharge of Sergeant Elvis A Presley of the 32nd Armored Regiment of the US Army's 3rd Armored Division was an exception.

Presley completed his two years of national service in West Germany, where he'd met his future wife Priscilla Beaulieu, then the 14-year-old stepdaughter of a US Air Force officer. Presley left Germany on March 2, 1960. His flight stopped to refuel at Prestwick Airport in Scotland – the only time Presley set foot in the UK. He arrived at McGuire Air Force Base near Fort Dix, New Jersey, on March 3, and was discharged on March 5. A little over two weeks later, after a brief stop home in Memphis, a chartered Greyhound bus bore Presley, musicians and entourage to Nashville to begin work on *Elvis Is Back!*.

To listeners to American radio, it wasn't really like he'd been away. Judicious drip-feeding of recordings made before he'd been drafted had kept Presley in the charts – he'd had 10 new Top 40 hits in absentia, and compilation albums of older material had also helped pay for Graceland's upkeep while its owner served Uncle Sam.

Presley, and those who advised him, had handled his service astutely. It was obviously far from ideal – Presley had been 23 when he'd been compelled to report for duty in 1958, and nobody really knew whether this rock'n'roll fad would still be a going concern by the time he was demobbed. He worried about this in radio interviews while in Germany ("I guess maybe it's possible the style has changed," he said, "but I don't really know about that.")

Presley took the long view nevertheless. Both Army and Navy offered to excuse him square-bashing and spud-peeling in favour of being an enlisted entertainer playing shows for the troops, but he understood that the smarter play would be to do his stint as an ordinary soldier, as unobtrusively as one of Earth's most famous people could (he was, however, permitted to live in a swish German hotel, rather than the barracks in Friedberg). On balance, Presley was entitled to one of the first tracks recorded for *Elvis Is Back!* – a sombre, faithful version of "Soldier Boy", a hit a few years earlier for New York doo-woppers The Four Fellows.

When the tapes started rolling, Presley had not sung in a proper recording studio for two years. Despite or because of this, the first session for the album must rank among the more productive few hours of his life. Among other cuts, Presley lashed down the opening track, a swaggering swing at Otis Blackwell's "Make Me Know It", and both sides of a non-album single, "Stuck On You"/"Fame And Fortune", which was rush-released and atop the *Billboard* chart before April was out. If there were ever any doubts about the fate-tempting hubris of the exclamation-pointed title, they were swiftly dispelled.

Presley was eased back into recording by a studio full of familiar faces – Scotty Moore on guitar, DJ Fontana on drums, The Jordanaires on backing vocals, abetted by Nashville fixtures Hank Garland, Buddy Harman, Bob Moore and Boots Randolph (the latter, a saxophonist, was still a few years from his biggest hit, "Yakety Sax", later repurposed as the theme tune for *The Benny Hill Show*).

CRITICS' VERDICTS

ELVIS IS BACK
"The post-service Presley sings in quieter vein (except for a wild one called 'Dirty, Dirty Feeling') and even makes a sophisticated, soft-sung point number out of 'Fever'." ALLEN EVANS, NME, 08/07/1960

GI BLUES
"Elvis whips up a storm, Elvis emotes with tremulous passion and Elvis, in fact, exploits all the facets of his highly individual art." LAURIE HENSHAW, MM, 03/12/1960

LIVING STEREO
MIRACLE SURFACE
This record contains the revolutionary new antistatic ingredient, 317X, which helps keep the record dust free, helps prevent surface noise, helps insure faithful sound reproduction.
RCA VICTOR
A "New Orthophonic" High Fidelity Recording
ELVIS IS BACK!
SIDE 1
Make Me Know It
Fever
The Girl of My Best Friend
I Will Be Home Again
Dirty, Dirty Feeling
Thrill of Your Love
SIDE 2
Soldier Boy
Such a Night
It Feels So Right
"The Girl Next Door Went A' Walking"
Like a Baby
Reconsider, Baby
MONO RD-27192
G. I. BLUES
ELVIS PRESLEY
RCA RECORDS
AN ORIGINAL SOUNDTRACK RECORDING
HAL WALLIS PRESENTS
ELVIS IN G.I. BLUES
AN ORIGINAL SOUNDTRACK RECORDING
3

★★★

"The more the merrier"

As the new decade gets underway, Elvis consolidates his popularity with a string of films. But with three coming out in 1962 and more on the way, some wonder if Elvis's priorities are in the right place — and if he will ever play for his British fans. *NME*, meanwhile, discovers Elvis wears no underpants on set, "not even briefs". "The Colonel is a great believer in underexposure," reveals **CHET ATKINS**.

NME | 6|4|1962

IS Elvis Presley getting too much exposure on the cinema screen? Is he making too many films in too rapid succession? I pose these questions because he has just completed his 10th movie – and he has at least another five pictures lined up for production as soon as possible.

I'm quite certain that British fans are perfectly happy with the flow of Presley pictures, and they are doubtless delighted to know that the steady stream is to be maintained. But it seems that over in the States, Presley's heavy filming schedule is causing many eyebrows to be raised – and even Elvis has considered the situation carefully.

But the truth of the matter is that Presley's non-stop campaign is deliberate. On his own admission, he has been trying to secure the maximum exposure, to make up for the time he lost while he was in the Army.

"I was gone two years, so I reckon I can risk it," he explains.

Nevertheless, Elvis is beginning to feel more than a little fatigued as a result of this perpetual pressure of work. And when he has dispensed with his present list of commitments, he hopes to slow down appreciably.

"I've been going from movie to movie with very little time off in between," he points out. "Frankly, I'm weary and need a long rest."

"I'VE BEEN GOING FROM MOVIE TO MOVIE... FRANKLY, I'M WEARY AND NEED A LONG REST"
Elvis Presley

Could this be the writing on the wall for his projected charity concert in Britain this year? For if he is exhausted, the chances of him crossing the Atlantic for just one performance must be regarded as slim. However, we shall see – and in the meantime, we are guaranteed a sequence of new Presley pictures with which we can keep in visual touch with him.

Latest epic to roll off the production line is *Kid Galahad*, described by the publicity moguls as "a modern-day drama with music, set against the exciting world of prize fighting". And it's particularly interesting in that it's been produced by the independent Mirisch Company, who were also responsible for *Some Like It Hot*, *The Magnificent Seven* and *West Side Story*. Let's hope this new one maintains the same standard.

Featured with Elvis in the picture is Jean Blackman, who was previously teamed with him in *Blue Hawaii*. The remaining stars are Gig Young, Lola Albright and Charles Bronson, It looks to me as though a soundtrack album won't be a practical proposition, because there are only seven songs in the film. But knowing the various record companies' facility for padding out with lengthy items of background and incidental music, I suppose nothing is impossible!

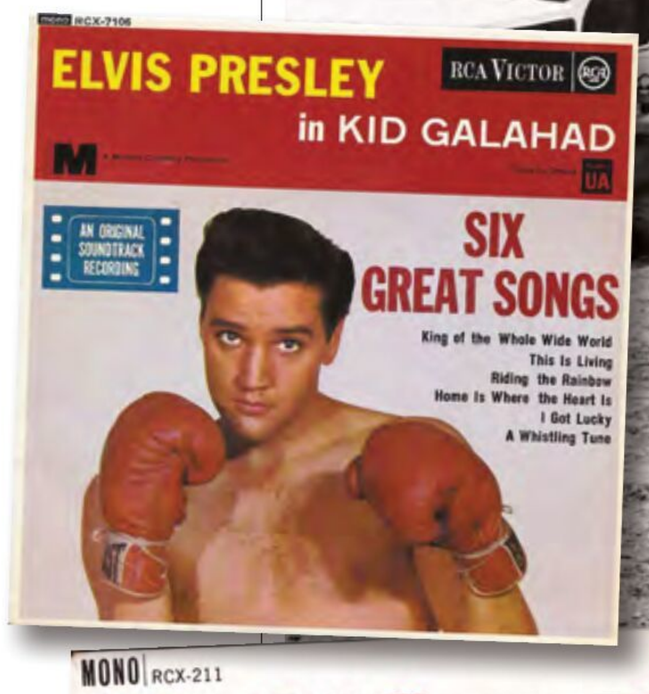
According to information sent me by Roy Cummings, one of *NME*'s Hollywood correspondents, you can look forward to hearing Elvis sing six numbers in this new picture. They

ELVIS PRESLEY IN THE MOVIES BLUE HAWAII / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO; ENTERTAINMENT PICTURES / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

Elvis plays it down in *Blue Hawaii*, 1961

are "King Of The Whole Wide World", "Ridin' The Rainbow", "A Whistlin' Tune", "Home Is Where The Heart Is", "I Get Lucky" and "This Is Living". The seventh number in the film, titled "Love Is For Lovers", is a showcase for Lola Albright.

Despite this relative lack of musical contribution (as compared with *Blue Hawaii*), Elvis fans will have plenty to delight them in this new movie. It's not a routine Hollywood boxing yarn, which invariably develops into an exposé of the fight game. Instead, its hero is a reluctant boxer who never becomes a champion.



ELVIS, of course, is the boxer in question. He plays the role of an ex-GI, and the story tells of the effect his presence has on a small community nestled in the Catskill Mountains. Although basically a drama, there is a warm human interest running through the film, and many humorous sequences. I'm told that Elvis took his role very seriously, and went into training like a real fighter.

He did road work, went on a strict protein diet, shadow-boxed and walloped the punch-bag, and boxed many hours with several good young professionals. He was coached by Mushy Callahan, former junior welterweight champion of the world, who also acted as technical adviser on all the fight segments in the film.

Mushy is full of praise for Presley's boxing aptitude. "He's my best pupil yet," he claims. "And he really could have made a good boxer." Considering that Mushy has also trained Burt Lancaster, Montgomery Clift and Kirk Douglas for similar film roles, that's praise indeed!

In addition to *Kid Galahad*, Elvis has *Follow That Dream* in the can, and we can expect to see both these movies in the relatively near future. And meantime, he swings into production with his latest Hal Wallis picture for Paramount, *Girls! Girls! Girls!*.

If you find this latter title rather confusing, let me explain that this is the film which was originally planned under the title of 'Gumbo Ya-Ya', the Creole expression which means "everybody talks at once". It seems that the executives concerned feel that *Girls! Girls! Girls!* is a more lucid and down-to-earth title – and I must say it strikes me as having considerably more box-office appeal!

This movie marks another change of character for Elvis, who is cast as the skipper of a fishing boat. But, since it is written by the same author as *Blue Hawaii*, and produced by the same team, you can bet that there will be plenty of opportunity for the Presley vocal chords to shine.

Subsequently, Elvis enters into his four-picture deal with MGM, the first of which will be a romantic comedy, titled 'Mister, Will You Marry Me?', and again this film will have a musical basis with the colourful San Diego beach resort as its principal locale.

Second MGM movie in this batch will be *Take Me To The Fair*, set at the Seattle State Fair. And although the remaining two films have not yet been decided, there is a distinct possibility that one will trace the life story of Presley's manager, Colonel Tom Parker. As revealed in the *NME* four weeks ago, if this materialises it will be called 'Right This Way Folks'.

So it's quite evident that Elvis is going to have very little spare time in 1962. And it's easy to understand why he will be in need of a rest when he has finally fulfilled all these outstanding obligations.

On disc, Presley's popularity continues unabated, with his current double-sided hit still selling strongly – and consequently delaying the release of his follow-up, "Good Luck Charm". RCA reckon there are still quite a few thousand sales left in the present releases and are naturally reluctant to issue the new one prematurely. So we may have to wait another three weeks or so.

However, I'm sure you will agree – when eventually you hear it – that "Good Luck Charm" has been well worth waiting for. It's a slow rocker, with a cute arrangement and an infectious rhythm, and with the Jordanaires harmonising effectively in the background.

Flip-side is one of those sentimental ballads Elvis performs so distinctively, titled "Anything That's Part Of You". This track hasn't registered chart-wise in the States, but knowing the British fans' partiality for Presley ballads, it could develop into another double-sided hit for him over here.

And by the way, good news from RCA. You'll be delighted to know that they have plenty of Presley

Elvis socks Jeremy Slate in *Girls! Girls! Girls!*, 1962

MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES; BETTMANN/GETTY IMAGES

TIMELINE — LIGHTS! CAMERA! ACTION!

Working at an exhausting rate, Elvis heads to Hollywood to film *GI Blues*, *Flaming Star*, *Wild In The Country* and more, before cutting tracks for *Blue Hawaii*...

1960

April

3 Second session for the post-army album in Nashville, includes standards "Are You Lonesome Tonight?" and "It's Now Or Never".

18 Elvis heads to Hollywood to begin work on *GI Blues*, his fifth film. This time he is accompanied by his retinue of friends, family and associates – the Memphis Mafia.

Elvis dates Judy Rawlins, an actress with a small part in the film.

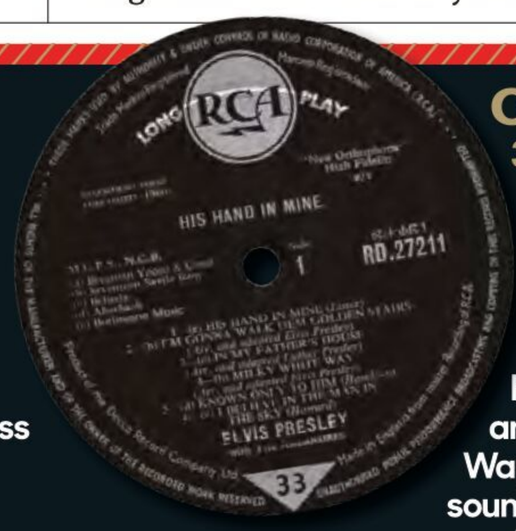
Arriving in LA to film at Paramount Studios, April 20, 1960

July

3 Elvis's father marries Dee Stanley.

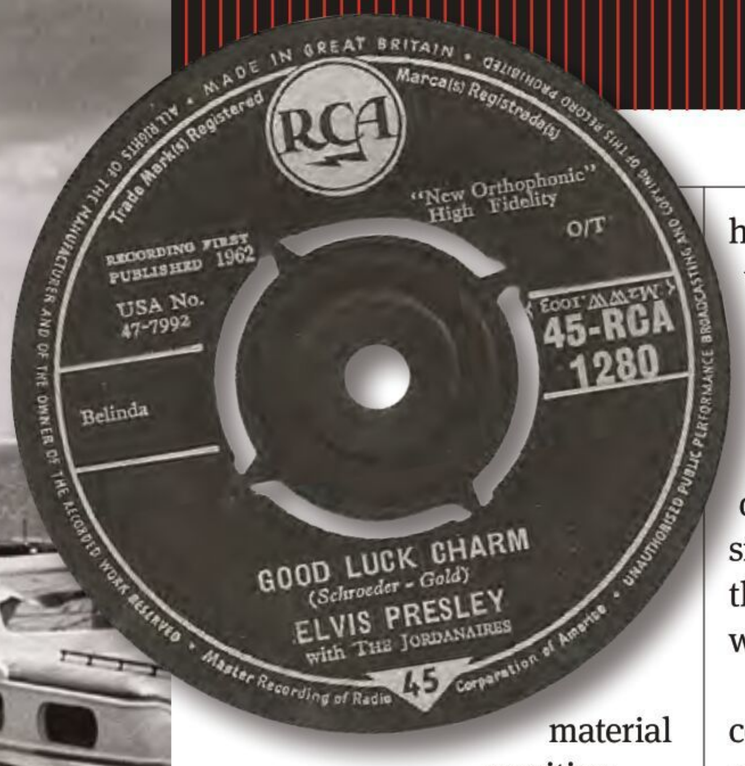
August

Elvis films *Flaming Star*, directed by Don Siegel.



October

30 Elvis records a gospel album in Nashville. An all-night session yields 14 songs, including "His Hand In Mine" and "Milky White Way". The *GI Blues* soundtrack spends 10 weeks at No 1 on the *Billboard* album chart. It stays on the chart for 111 weeks.



material awaiting release, and they anticipate that this will be a plentiful year for Elvis issues – one LP and a couple of EPs are already planned later in the year.

To revert to my opening question – is Elvis getting too much exposure? – my answer would be: certainly not, at the moment. But it could well be that his planned lengthy rest, when he has completed his next five pictures, will come at an appropriate time in his career.

WHEN Elvis Presley steps into a recording studio, he takes immediate and complete control of all the musicians and technical staff – relying on his own ability to act as musical director, A&R manager and artist! And the chances are that Elvis is the only one who knows the numbers he is going to record; the musicians don't hear them until the session!

These, and other Presley recording secrets, were revealed to me by TV personality, agent and manager Bunny Lewis, who spent six hours in a small Hollywood studio watching Elvis at work — recording numbers for his new film, *Girls! Girls! Girls!*.

"Elvis was working on a three-day session, sweating it out from noon to midnight," reported Bunny. "He had brought some of his boys from Nashville, including the vocalising Jordanaires, who are quite fantastic.

"At no time did I see them look at any orchestrations, nor were they given any instructions. The session was completely controlled by Elvis, who didn't hesitate to take advice from all and sundry, but made it clear that he knew the sound he wanted and went after it until he got it.

"It was amazing that they should all work as a team without any music written down on paper. Apparently the set-up is that Elvis learns the words of the songs he plans to record. Then a demonstration disc is made. This is played about six times to the musicians in the studio. From it they pick up their musical interpretations. They were a truly professional crowd."

Bunny was told that if Elvis and the musicians couldn't come up with suitable impromptu arrangement within about half an hour, the number was often scrapped. On some occasions the lyric would be re-written to Elvis's satisfaction and they would have another stab at it.

"During all this time, Elvis never lost his temper or raised his voice," said Bunny. "He seemed to get frustrated with himself quite frequently. I was terribly impressed with his dedication."

During breaks in the session, Elvis chatted to Bunny – mainly about the recordings they were doing. "I found him very quiet, very polite, very intense," said Bunny. "And I found a topic on which he will talk for hours is cars. After all, if a chap's got 14, he must be interested in them."

Another point to prove that Elvis is very much the boss on a session is the fact that nobody passes a "take" except Elvis. During the six hours Bunny was in the studio, he did not see Elvis eat, although soft drinks were being carried in for him most of the time.

"What a terrific looking fellow he is," enthused Bunny. "He stands about six feet tall, has broad shoulders and narrow hips. With his Greek god profile; he is a very commanding personality. Even by watching him at the microphone, I was able to see his outstanding talent.

"I think it is a pity he has not been to Britain to give people the opportunity of seeing him. I am fully convinced that record buyers here would realise what a lot of bad rock is being foisted on to them once they saw Elvis in person. He stands above comparison, a giant of pop music."

BUNNY also discovered that Elvis does the utmost to discs that he can. "He is interested in records. He has heard a lot of British artists and knows a good deal about the recording set-up. I suppose he has to keep on his toes night and day — there are so many singers going all out to topple him from his perch."

He also paid tribute to the musicians accompanying Elvis. "Nothing is too much trouble for them. They are paid a lot of money, but they earn it. Elvis was working with complete confidence in them and they are part of the reason he turns out so many good records.

"Another is because of the tremendous musical feel he has."

Incidentally, Elvis was impeccably dressed, reports Bunny. He was wearing an open-necked sports shirt, tight trousers and Texan boots. He has lost 20lbs in weight and looks more of a pin-up boy than ever." ***MIKE HELLICAR***

"ELVIS STANDS ABOVE COMPARISON, A GIANT OF POP MUSIC"
Bunny Lewis

MOVIE fans are in for a treat with *Follow That Dream* but some Elvis Presley fans may end up surprised, and maybe a little disappointed – for the one-time hip-swinging screen lover emerges in this United Artists release as a *comedian*!

Yes, Elvis had us in fits of laughter as hilarious escapades followed hard on each other's heels in this light-hearted and thoroughly entertaining film. He plays Toby Quimper, son of Pop Quimper (Arthur O'Connell). Together with 19-year-old Holly (Anne Helm), eight-year-old identical orphan twins Eddy and Teddy, and three-year-old Ariadne they go in search of new pastures.

Forced to camp by the side of an unopened road when Pop's 50-dollar car runs out of petrol, they decide the following morning that the spot is a good one to settle on. There are laughs galore when Elvis goes to the bank to borrow money. The loans director thinks he's a hold-up man and faints. When Elvis tries to summon help the alarm is set off and pandemonium breaks out. You'll roar again when a bunch of gangsters hire some hoodlums to put paid to Mr Presley because the Quimper homestead (now a thriving fishing camp) is a nuisance to their mobile gambling establishment.

Elected sheriff of the camp, Elvis thinks the hoodlums are drunk when they try to run him down. He sets out to teach them a lesson. His

1961

November
Elvis begins work on *Wild In The Country*. *GI Blues* is among the top-grossing films of the year.

December
Flaming Star opens nationally to good reviews but lacks the box-office bite of *GI Blues*.

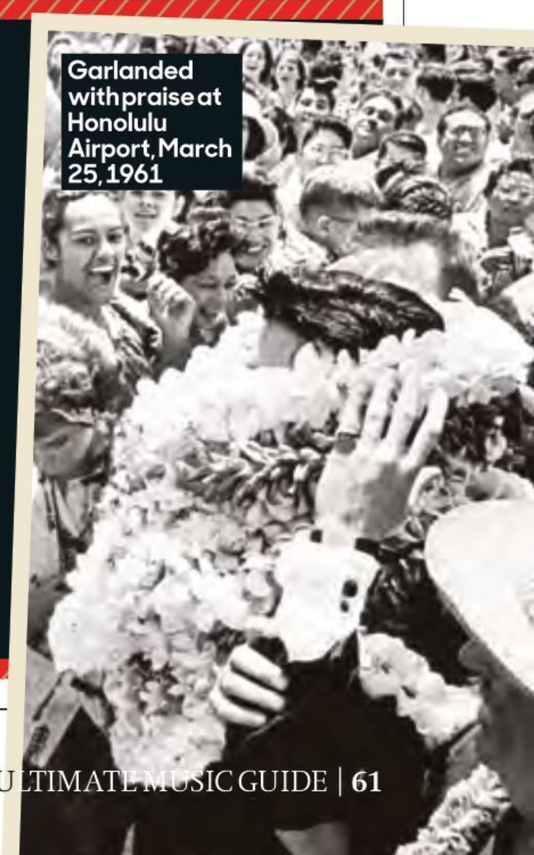
February
25 Tennessee Governor Buford Ellington proclaims Elvis Presley Day. Elvis performs two shows at the Ellis auditorium in Memphis ina benefit for 26 local charities, his first headlining dates in almost three years.

March
21 Recording of tracks for forthcoming film *Blue Hawaii*. The classic "I Can't Help Falling In Love" With You" comes from this session.
25 Elvis arrives in Hawaii for benefit concert. 3,000 fans pack Honolulu Airport. The show raises $65,000.

Live at the Ellis auditorium in Memphis, 1961

July
Shoots *Follow That Dream*.

October
The *Blue Hawaii* soundtrack enters the charts for a year and a half run, staying at No 1 for 20 weeks. Elvis spends the remainder of the year filming *Kid Galahad*, his 10th motion picture.


Garlanded with praise at Honolulu Airport, March 25, 1961

"THERE'LL BE MORE SONGS AND MUSIC FOR EVERY CUSTOMER... AND ELVIS IS SINGING BETTER THAN EVER" *Joe Lilley*

method of disarming them is the funniest thing I've seen In a long time. Finally, when all is well after Elvis has fought a court battle to allow Pop to keep his orphan family, Holly decides that the time is right for a screen kiss to put the seal on their happiness.

The music fades as she strokes our hero's forehead. Tenderly she asks him if this is the right method. "Well, not so much like you wuz ironing a shirt," he replies — and even that scene breaks out in laughter. Though Elvis sings five songs, not once do we see the famous wiggle. He sings two of them lying on his back and the others are well-moulded into production.

Sung over the credits, "What A Wonderful Life" is a swinging number that sets just the right mood for the 110 minutes of fun that are to follow. Later he breezes into "I'm Not The Marrying Kind", "Sound Advice" and "Follow That Dream".

Finally, setting the mood for the would-be love scene near the end, Elvis strums an old guitar and croons "Angel" as he lazes back on a veranda in the moonlight.

Follow That Dream is no Presley dramatic, it's a colourful bouncing film that Mum and Dad can take the kids to see and be sure of all-round satisfaction.

I enjoyed it. Hope you will too. ***CHRISHUTCHINS***

NME | 13|7|1962

HOLLYWOOD – Suddenly the music quickened and into the group of dancers bounded Elvis Presley! He wore a black silk shirt, open at the neck; black silk pants, black half-Wellington. He was tanned and, man, so good-looking!

In his hands that good old guitar became alive and, with a torrid beat, he sang, "I'm just a red-blooded boy, I'm just a red-blooded boy, I can't stop thinking about GIRLS, GIRLS, GIRLS!"

And little wonder, for on the Paradise Cove set in front of me, where Elvis was wrapping up the final sequence of *Girls! Girls! Girls!* were plenty of girls — Samoans, Tahitians, Siamese, Filipinos, all slim, bright-eyed, smiling and curvaceous. Twenty-five I counted! Plus six American girls, similarly endowed but with more clothes on.

These smiling beauties swayed and sang round a water's edge dancefloor, torches aflame. Above, stars were twinkling through palm fronds, and a moon shining over the creamy surf and still water beyond!

It certainly was the ideal setting for Elvis, who twisted as he sang. Then he threw his guitar to one of his pals, sitting next to me and director Norman Taurog. Elvis went on to do a clever impersonation of the Siamese dancers, as all the girls twisted. Then he wound up the number, twisting like crazy with the six American girls.

The cameras moved in for a close-up of Elvis and the girls. One camera on a crane rose high and swooped down. The other zoomed in and out and Mr Taurog called, "Cut! Fine, Elvis. Fine, Girls. Now one more with the same action but keep closer together round Elvis."

Again they all went through the numbers, the finale of the motion-picture, titled, *Girls! Girls! Girls!*.

Between takes, Elvis relaxed with two of his pals beside him, but watching intently everything that was going on under the guidance of dance director Charles O'Curran. In his high, green-canvas chair, with his name, black on a white ground, painted on it, Elvis sipped some coffee, dabbed at his forehead with a towel, smiled when I asked him if he wasn't making too many pictures this year.

"Man, the more, the merrier, especially if they are good like this one, and the one I finished a few months ago, *Kid Galahad*," he told me. "I love to work, especially with girls. We've got some of the best dancers in the States. And, I've got a wonderful director – Norman Taurog. We're old friends; y'know he directed *GI Blues* and *Blue Hawaii*. He is the greatest.

"And I had a wonderful time doing *Follow That Dream*, Arthur O'Connell – my Paw in the story – what he taught me!"

Elvis mentioned that there were 14 numbers in *Girls! Girls! Girls!* and while he was going through the routine for a final check for positions, I learned from Joe Lilley, who wrote the musical score, that the numbers have settings ranging from a lantern-lit, waterfront cabaret to the sunny blue of the open sea; romantic ballads under a mellow moon and crazy, colourful ensembles ranging from flamencos to hully-gully and from tango to twist.

As well as Elvis's 14 numbers, Stella Stevens, as the cabaret queen carrying a torch for Elvis, delivers a trio of sultry songs on her own – "Baby, Baby, Baby", "The Nearness Of You" and "Never Let Me Go".

"There'll be songs and music for every customer," said Joe Lilley. "And I can tell you Elvis is singing better than ever."

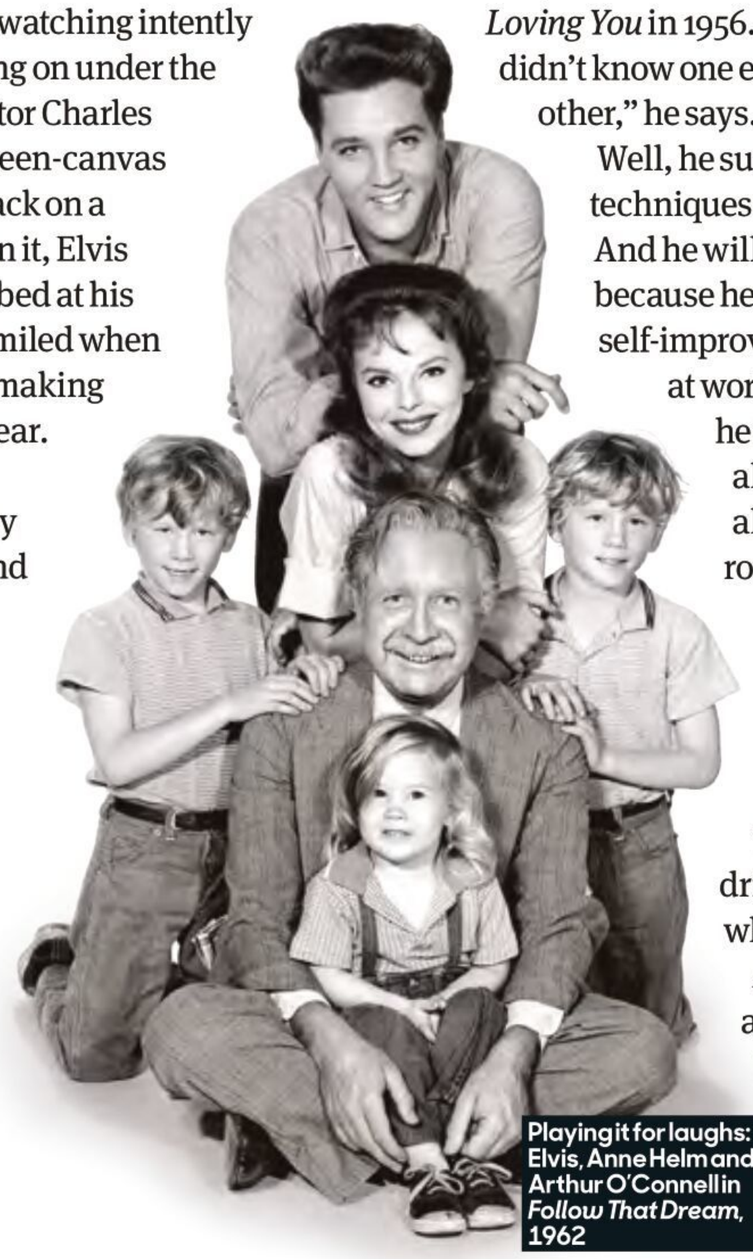
Elvis now has finished his 11th movie. He smiles when you remind him that his first film was *Loving You* in 1956. "Man, was I terrible! I didn't know one end of the camera from the other," he says.

Well, he sure has learned acting techniques during the past two years, And he will never stop learning, because he has a great desire for self-improvement. Watching him at work, you see quickly that he is a professional. He is always on the set on time, always knows his lines, the routines and the action.

Sometimes, he will sit in the back seat of his enormous black station-wagon (registration number, black on white, Tennessee 2X-144) and be driven around the studio while he goes over lines.

And watching him in action, with 25 girls twisting like crazy, I was assured that he means it when he said: "The more movies, the merrier!"

JONAHRUDDY



Playing it for laughs: Elvis, Anne Helm and Arthur O'Connell in *Follow That Dream*, 1962

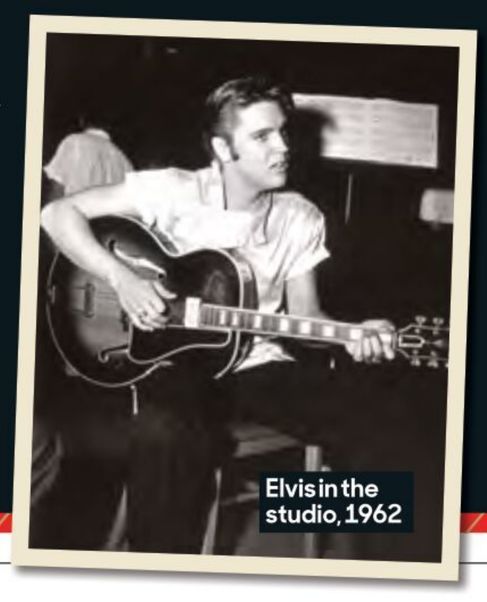
CINEMATIC COLLECTION / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO; APIC/GETTY IMAGES

TIMELINE LIGHTS! CAMERA! ACTION!

The King's film career continues apace as he heads to Vegas and Seattle, then records soundtracks. Priscilla spends Christmas at Graceland...

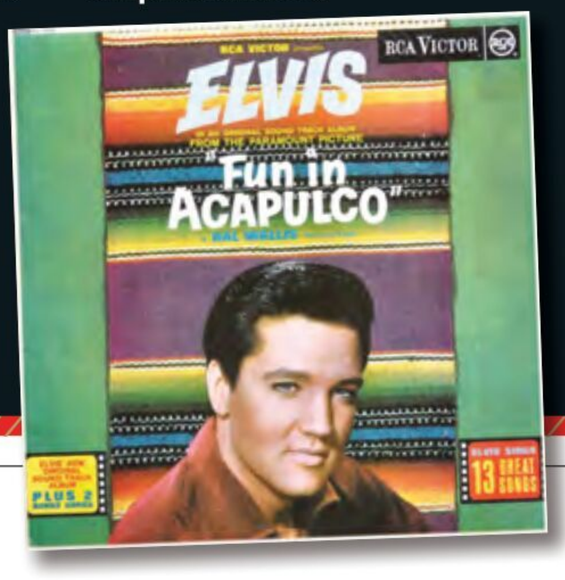
1962

March
Elvis flits between RCA studios in Memphis and Radio Recorders in Hollywood where he records tracks including the soundtrack of *Girls! Girls! Girls!*



Elvis in the studio, 1962

June
Priscilla arrives in Los Angeles for her first post-army visit with Elvis. He is 27, she is 17. It's the first time they have seen each other in over two years and is the result of months of careful negotiation between Elvis and her parents. The deal they arrive at is that Priscilla will be chaperoned at all times and will not stay with Elvis. She moves into his Bellagio Road home and writes a fortnight's worth of postcards to her parents which will be posted from there while she accompanies Elvis to Las Vegas – where he introduces her to amphetamines.



Elvis with Vicky Tiu in *It Happened At The World's Fair*, 1963

Elvis takes a break as Steve Sholes talks to producer Chet Atkins, RCA studios, Nashville

NME | 14|9|1962

PROBABLY the biggest question mark on the pop music scene today concerns the possibility of Elvis Presley visiting this country. Will he eventually decide to bow to the wishes of his British fans, and make a few appearances over here? Or will he rest content in the knowledge that his flow of records and films is keeping us shouting for more?

I decided to put this question to Chet Atkins, A&R manager of the RCA recording studios in Nashville, when he was in London last weekend. After all, he frequently comes into contact with Elvis, and he should be able to give some indication of how the wind is blowing.

I have to report, I'm afraid, that Chet's reply was more than a little disillusioning. "I doubt very much if Elvis will come to Britain," he told me. "Certainly I don't visualise him performing publicly over here – although, of course, there's always the chance that one of his films might bring him here for location work."

What makes Chet so sure about Presley's reluctance to work here? "It's simply that this is their secret weapon," he explained. "The Colonel is a great believer in underexposure – and I guess he feels that, if Elvis were to undertake too many personal appearances, it could kill the spell that now keeps Elvis on top."

Chet pointed out that he was not chiefly responsible for producing Elvis's discs – that task usually falls to Steve Sholes. "But we have pretty lengthy sessions with Elvis, and Steve gets kinda tired – so then I take over," he continued.

"Elvis normally records on a Sunday," said Chet. "And he likes working all through the night. He starts work around midnight and often continues right through until seven or eight in the morning."

Floyd was telling me what a pleasure it is to work with Elvis. "He's a very intelligent young man and he knows exactly what he wants," said Floyd. "He's very popular with the boys in the studio, because he rarely shows any temperament and has remained unaffected."

"ELVIS LIKES WORKING ALL THROUGH THE NIGHT UNTIL 7 OR 8AM"
Chet Atkins

DEREK JOHNSON

NME | 9|11|1962

"WE'LL give Elvis a new wardrobe for this film, and have him look like a smart, well-dressed young businessman. It's a switch from sports shirt and blue jeans and sports jackets," said the producer of *Take Me To The Fair* at Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Studios, Mr Presley's third movie for 1962.

Sy Devore, the master-tailor of show business stars, was given the assignment of equipping Elvis with his new wardrobe. For the last Presley film, *Girls! Girls! Girls!*, the Devore organisation had provided Mr Presley with three raw-silk jackets and several pairs of black silk trousers.

"It was decided to make this wardrobe as a sort of surprise for him," Sy Devore told me. "I had his measurements and engaged an actor who is his exact size and weight to stand in for his fittings.

"We then took the wardrobe to the studio and all I can say is that Elvis flipped when he saw it. He tried on the clothes and they were almost a perfect fit. He looked marvellous in them and I'll tell you why. He has a natural flair for wearing well-fitting clothes."

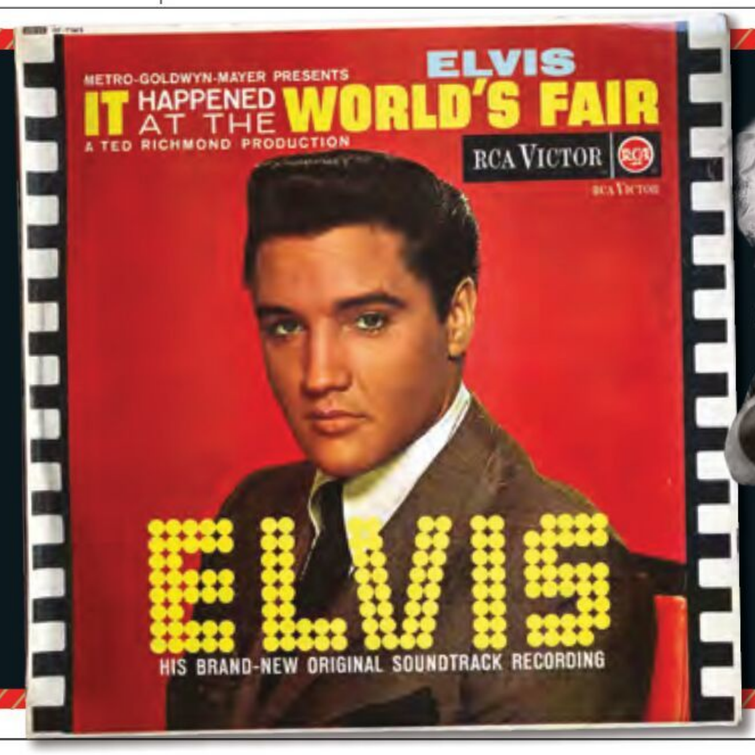
Mr Devore gave me the cost of the clothes in dollars, but to bring it to Savile Row standards, I've calculated the equivalent in guineas. There were, therefore, 10 suits at 100 guineas each; four sports coats at 75 guineas each; 30 specially designed shirts with a deep collar and narrowed cuffs, at eight guineas each; 15 pairs of slacks at 25 guineas a pair, and six dozen ties at three guineas each!

The trousers Elvis Presley wears have to be specially designed. It seems that he wears no underwear, not even briefs. All his jackets have to be designed to allow for freedom of movement. He wears boots, not shoes. They are of the short Wellington kind, called Continental Gaiters in Hollywood. In *Take Me To The Fair*, Elvis plays a pilot who gets romantically involved with a lovely girl at the Seattle World Fair.

So Mr Devore designed a special black leather jacket which he wears while piloting his plane. It is probably the world's most expensive leather jacket. It cost 80 guineas, and is entirely handmade.

Mr Devore considers this film marks the start of a new era for Elvis Presley. "He will take his place amongst America's well-dressed men," he assured me. "I consider this is my greatest styling achievement since I persuaded Bing Crosby to give up his incredible, chromatic sports shirts and trousers which didn't match at all."

The nice thing is that Sy Devore uses the finest British materials for his suits, jackets and trousers. Thus Elvis is sporting fine suitings from Huddersfield, Bradford and the West of England in *Take Me To The Fair*. ***JONAHRUDDY***



Summer
Elvis films *It Happened At The World's Fair*, in Seattle. A tame EP vehicle set against the futuristic backdrop of the event, a young Kurt Russell pops up in several scenes – he later stars in *Elvis*, a biopic. At this time, Elvis is commanding $500,000 a picture plus a cut of receipts. He spends the rest of the year recording the soundtrack for this and for *Fun In Acapulco*. He ends the year as *Motion Picture* magazine's fifth most popular star.

Priscilla with dog Honey at Memphis International airport, January 11, 1963

October
Elvis films are banned in Mexico after a riot during a screening of *GI Blues*.

December
Priscilla spends Christmas at Graceland. She returns to Germany briefly in the new year but moves out, and finishes her final year of high school in Memphis.

MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES, DON CRAVENS/GETTY IMAGES, TCD/PROD.DB / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

Released: 1961 - 1969

Record Label: RCA VICTOR

THE MOVIE SOUNDTRACKS 1961–1969

Elvis's films decline rapidly in quality, but continue to serve their function — as Technicolor advertisements for the soundtrack album. "Dominic The Impotent Bull", anyone?

BY **STEPHEN DEUSNER**

WHEN Elvis makes his appearance in 1961's *Blue Hawaii*, he's standing in the doorway of an airplane at Honolulu Airport, decked out in military uniform and locked in a lengthy kiss with a blonde stewardess. His character, the reluctant heir to a pineapple empire, is returning from a two-year deployment overseas and he spends the entire movie trying to figure out what to do with himself. Should he go into the family business or strike out on his own? Lean into the privilege of wealth or make his own fortune?

That was essentially Elvis's own dilemma in the early 1960s. He, too, had been discharged from the army after two years in Germany, and he returned to America to find the pop landscape had changed dramatically. Rock'n'roll bad boys were out, squeaky-clean crooners and girl groups and self-serious folk singers were in. While *Blue Hawaii* wasn't his first film after growing out his military buzzcut, it very loudly signalled Elvis's intentions as a pop star: he didn't want to rest on his laurels or revisit past victories. Instead, he wanted to become something new, which meant pushing himself to innovate, to buck fads and create his own style, to make his own way forward.

He did absolutely none of that. The barrage of formulaic teen flicks that followed nearly beat the artist right out of Elvis, who had 24 starring roles between *Blue Hawaii* in 1961 and *Change Of Habit* in 1969. He played essentially the same part in each one, a humble, hard-working, incredibly talented everyman who was irresistible to the opposite sex. If he once worked hard as an actor – go watch *Love Me Tender* from 1956 or *King Creole* from 1958 – he gains a cocky confidence in the 1960s that often resembles sleepwalking. Even in some of his better films from the '60s, he appears to be casting out in all directions for some distraction or some challenge, something that'll make the experience interesting, whether it's the gleaming white suit in the execrable *Trouble With Girls* or co-star Ann-Margret in *Viva Las Vegas*. More than Woodstock or Altamont, the poor box-office performance of *Change Of Habit* might be the real end of the '60s. It's certainly the end of his acting career, which lasted longer than The Beatles were The Beatles, longer than The Band was The Band, longer than The Supremes were The Supremes.

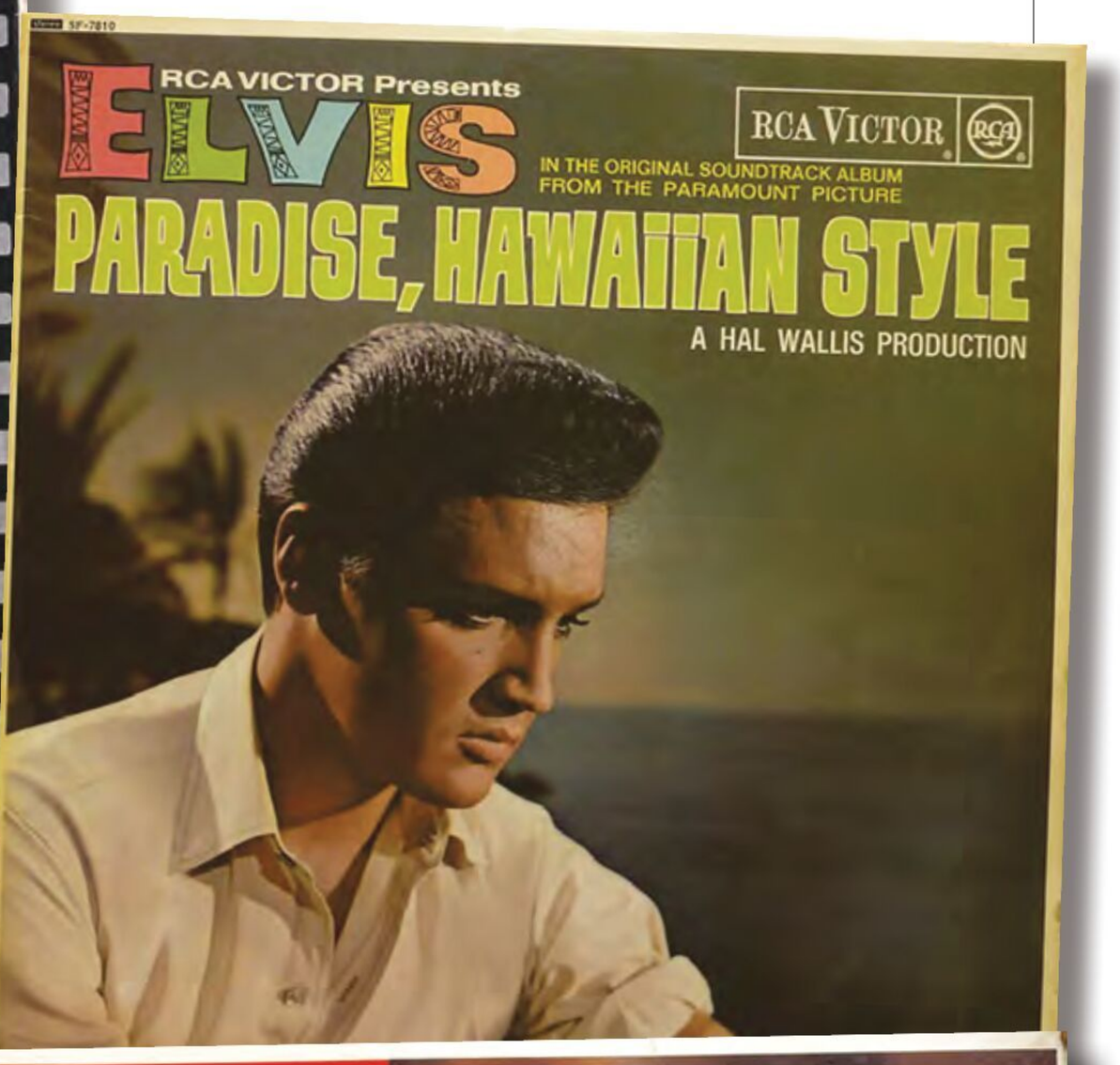
There's nothing in his filmography that's ever going to compete with *Bonnie & Clyde* or *Easy Rider* or even the wackiest of the James Bond films, but there are some bright spots, starting with the soundtrack to **Blue Hawaii** (★★★★). It plays up the mid-century fascination with Hawaiian culture heralded by exotica artists like Martin Denny and Hal Aloma, and Elvis eases into that setting with a nonchalant charm. It even includes his first recording of "Can't Help Falling In Love", still one of his most popular tunes. Sure, that classic might have sounded better if he'd sung it to his love interest instead of his love interest's grandmother, but it's a highlight nevertheless.

But Elvis was never just selling himself or his soundtracks. He was also selling vacations. His films whisk the viewer away to exotic locales – glitzy Las Vegas! Lush Oahu! Swampy Florida? Along the way the camera savours the scenery, whether it's the sleek interior of a luxury hotel or a pristine beach at sunset. He would return to the South Pacific several times, though he would never truly recapture the modest magic of *Blue Hawaii*. Still, the **Girls! Girls! Girls!** soundtrack (★★) from 1962 includes the

CRITICS' VERDICTS

GIRLS! GIRLS! GIRLS!/FUN IN ACAPULCO/ ROUSTABOUT/ KISSIN' COUSINS

"Elvis's films of the '60s are one of the few examples of the memory not growing rosier as times go on... There's no denying that the soundtracks appeared to have been made on a conveyor belt."
MICHAEL OLDFIELD, MELODY MAKER, 19/11/1977



hit "Return To Sender" as well as "The Walls Have Ears", his sole foray into tango. But 1966's **Paradise, Hawaiian Style** (★) is barely memorable except for the tongue-twister "Queenie Wahine's Papaya" and the big production number at the end.

IN 1963 he went south of the border for 1963's **Fun In Acapulco**, which ain't *Charade* but does at least live up to its title. Actually, Elvis himself didn't shoot on location; he was barred from entering Mexico, owing to a conflict with a politician who was upset the star wouldn't play his daughter's birthday party (which actually became a plot point in a later screenplay). You can tell it's a stand-in wearing a black wig in the wide exterior shots, but at the least it has a semblance of a plot. Elvis plays a disgraced trapeze artist who falls in love with Ursula Andress and cures his acrophobia with some mariachi tunes and some cliff diving. Most of the soundtrack (★★) is ridiculous, especially "(There's) No Room To Rhumba In A Sports Car", but "Bossa Nova Baby" is one of his most underrated singles, a manic collision of styles with an infectious organ riff. It's also one of the wildest performances in any of his films.

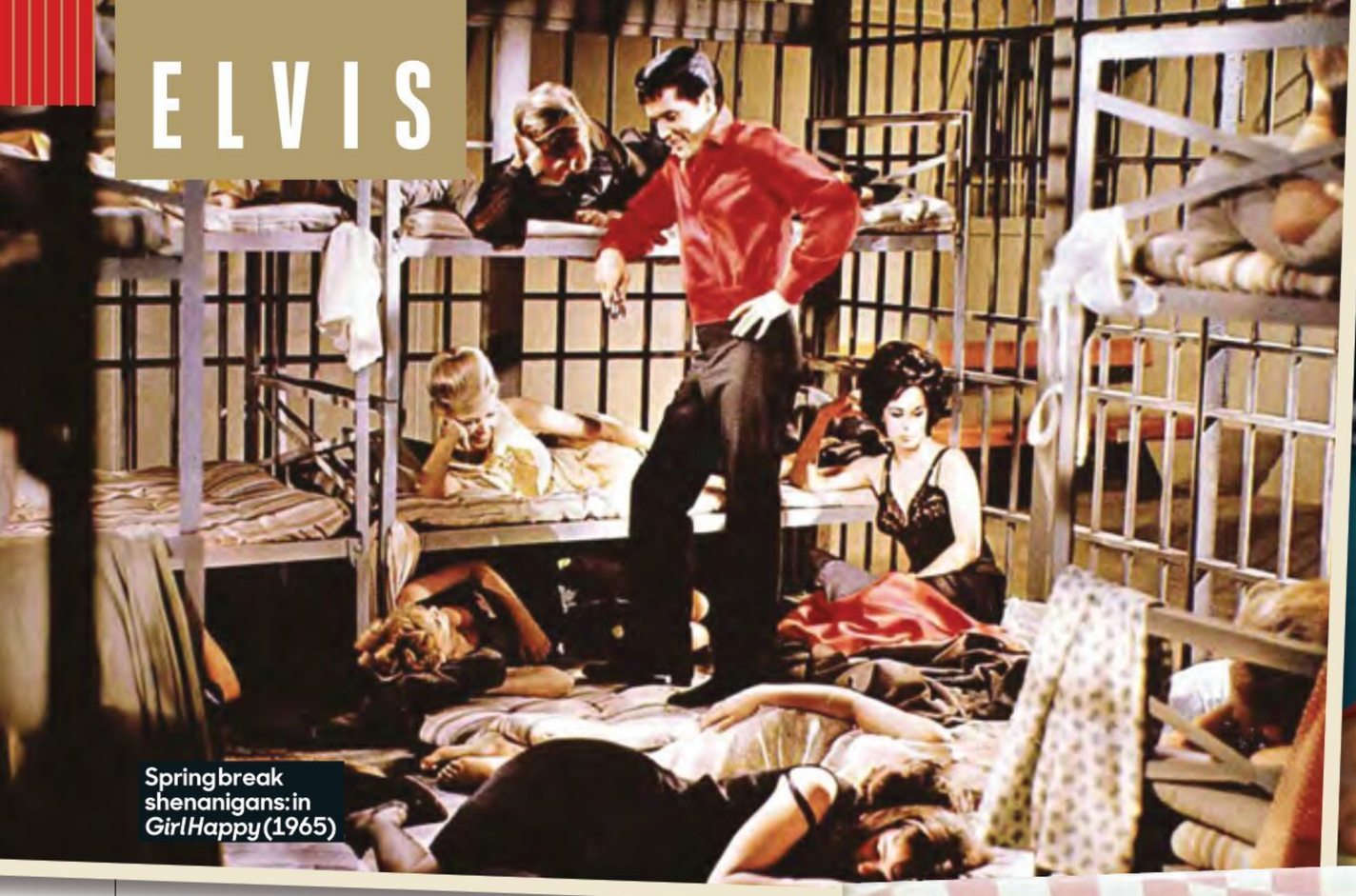
Ostensibly, these films were billboards for their soundtracks, almost all of which outsold almost all of his non-soundtracks throughout the decade. In fact, Elvis's film career was ambitious in at least one crucial way: it imagines a pop industry where movies are the organising format rather than albums. For a while it actually worked, feeding hits from the silver screen to pop chart, and Elvis dominated the field. In 1964 **Viva Las Vegas** made more money than The Beatles' *Hard Day's Night*. That's actually his best film, certainly his most enjoyable, with a dynamic setting, an exciting third act, and a co-star with whom he had undeniable chemistry. (The year before, Ann-Margret had starred in the best Elvis movie not to feature Elvis, *Bye Bye Birdie*.) Aside from a few duds like "My Rival", the soundtrack (★★★★) is pretty solid, anchored by the incredible title track and a smart cover of Ray Charles' "What'd I Say". So why did it only get a four-song EP rather than a full album? The full album wasn't released until 1993, when it was combined with songs from 1964's **Roustabout** (★★).

Viva Las Vegas was Elvis's last truly good movie, the last one where it felt like he was really trying, and it was also the last to turn a massive profit. It was all downhill from there, in every way imaginable. Subsequent films repeat the same setups, the same concepts, even some of the same love interests (but when it's Shelley Fabares, who's complaining?). Elvis didn't even bother to record new songs for 1965's decent **Tickle Me**, in which he plays a ranchhand who falls in love with an aerobics instructor and ends up in a haunted hotel. To keep the already meagre budget in check, the songs were all culled from various sessions from the early '60s and were only released on a pair of EPs (both ★ ★). If the whole project sounds dated now, it must have seemed especially stale at the time.

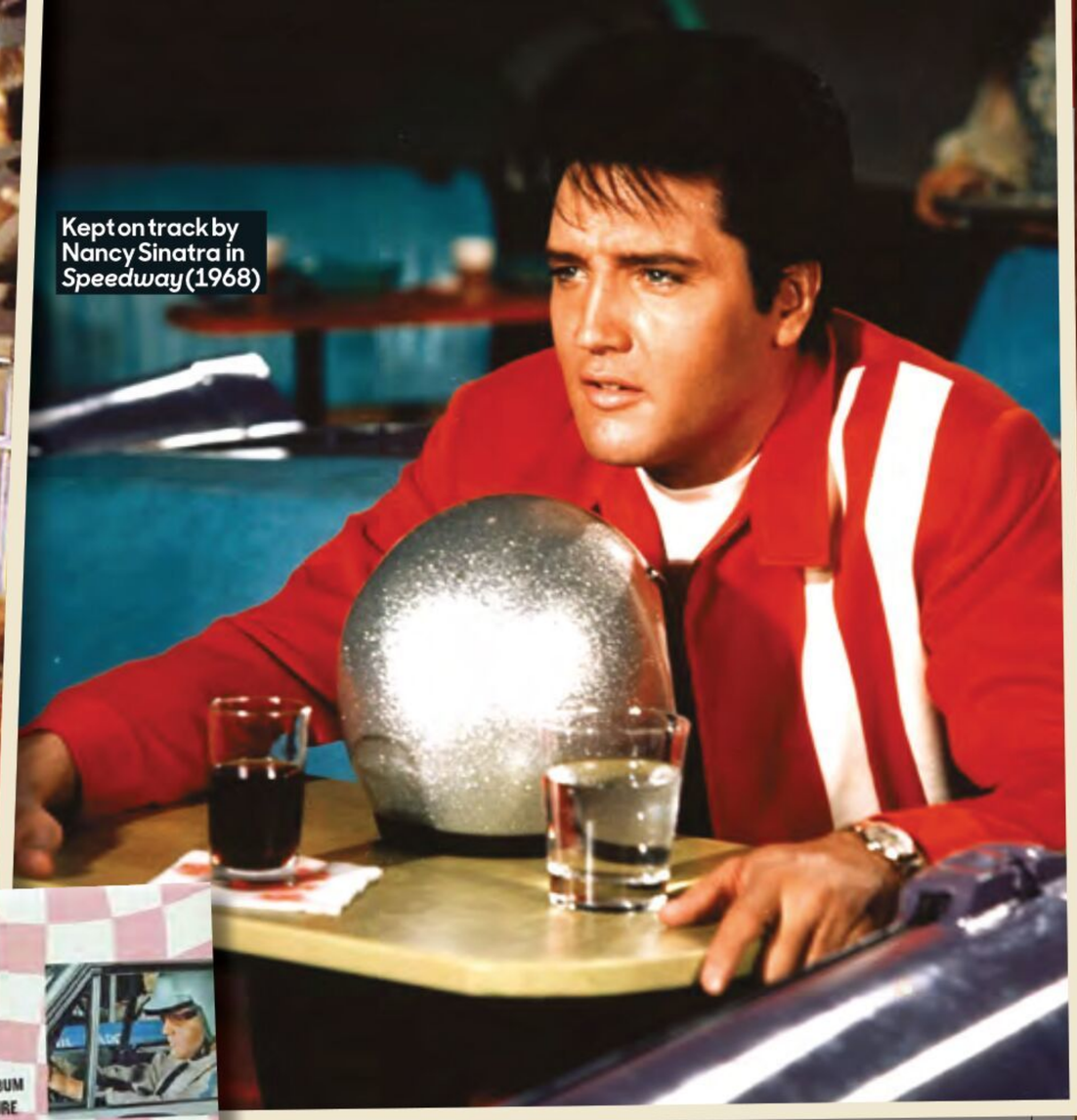
Girl Happy, from that same year, is much livelier, and Elvis looks much more engaged in these spring break shenanigans. The Beatles had

★ ★

THESE FILMS WERE BILLBOARDS FOR THEIR SOUNDTRACKS – WHICH SOLD MORE THAN THE NON-SOUNDTRACKS



Spring break shenanigans: in *Girl Happy* (1965)



Kept on track by Nancy Sinatra in *Speedway* (1968)

finally surpassed him in popularity, and pop groups were hipper than pop singers, so the screenwriters threw in a backing band that functions less as musical support and more as *Help!*-style comic relief. But who would believe Elvis was anything but the lead singer and the star attraction? On the soundtrack (★★★), he convincingly sells a clunky song like "Fort Lauderdale Chamber Of Commerce" and makes "Do The Clam" (which isn't really a dance) sound like a weird parody of beach-blanket bingos.

Bivalve-wise, **Clambake**, from 1967, is Elvis's loopy version of *The Prince And The Pauper*, in which he plays an oil baron's son who switches identities and convertibles with a poor mechanic. He looks awful on screen, bloated and bored and embarrassed by the beach scenes, which were obviously filmed on a studio backlot. The only interesting aspect of the film is the controversy surrounding the fit of the star's swimming trunks, which left little to viewers' imaginations. Worse, he sounds terrible on the soundtrack (★). Is "Confidence" his least confident performance ever? It's certainly the worst of the many kiddie songs in these films.

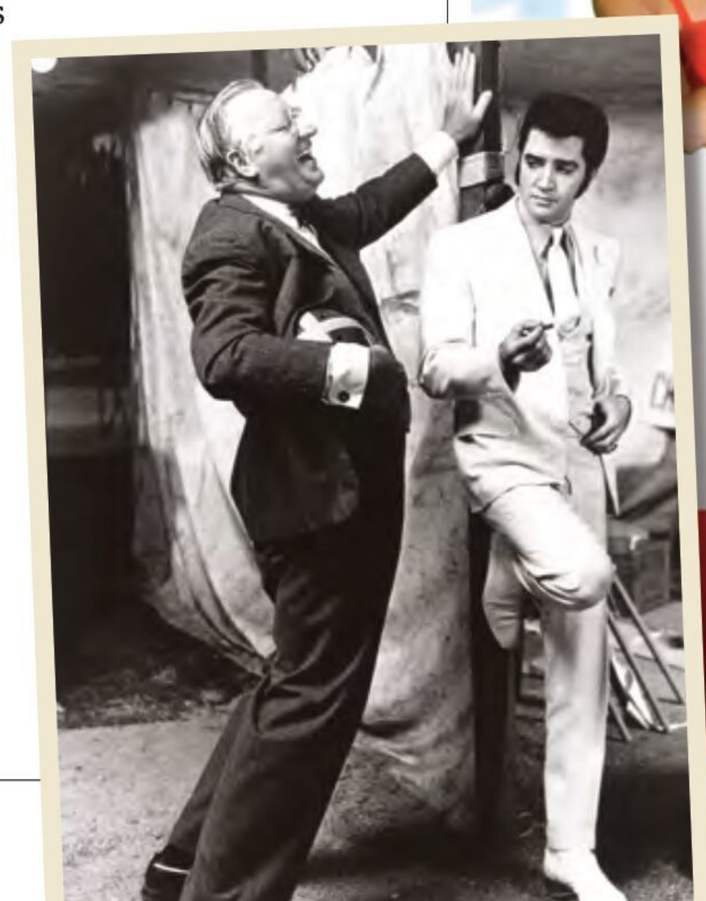
Elvis tried and failed not once, but twice to approximate the excitement of that deadly road race from *Viva Las Vegas*. Rather than embarrassed or simply bored, Elvis comes across as monumentally pissed off in 1966's *Spinout*, and the soundtrack (★) suggests his gruff demeanour may stem from having to sing dreck like "Beach Shack" ("*Come see my etchings*") and "Smorgasbord" ("*I'll take the dish I please, please the dish I take*"). **Speedway** from 1968 is better, partly because it couldn't possibly be worse but mainly because it co-stars Nancy Sinatra. She's about as natural a thespian as Elvis is, but at least she gets a song penned by Lee Hazlewood rather than by Colonel Tom Parker's stable of half-assers. "Your Groovy Self" has the strut and attitude of her biggest hits, anchoring a soundtrack (★) that is otherwise less than groovy.

In any other actor's filmography, *Clambake* would be a low point, but Elvis outdid himself with the 1969 period piece **The Trouble With Girls**. He plays the manager of a travelling vaudeville troupe that sets up in a small town to simultaneously charm and swindle the locals. Nobody escapes the stench of the film, not even a young Dabney Coleman, an old Vincent Price, or even a mummified John Carradine. Elvis, post-comeback, sports a fancy suit, long sideburns, a deep tan, and a general air of disregard; he's an alien on screen, a time traveller sent 40 years into the past to sing some bad songs. It crashed at the box office and the soundtrack (★) didn't fare much better on the charts, despite contributions by Mac Davis and Billy Strange.

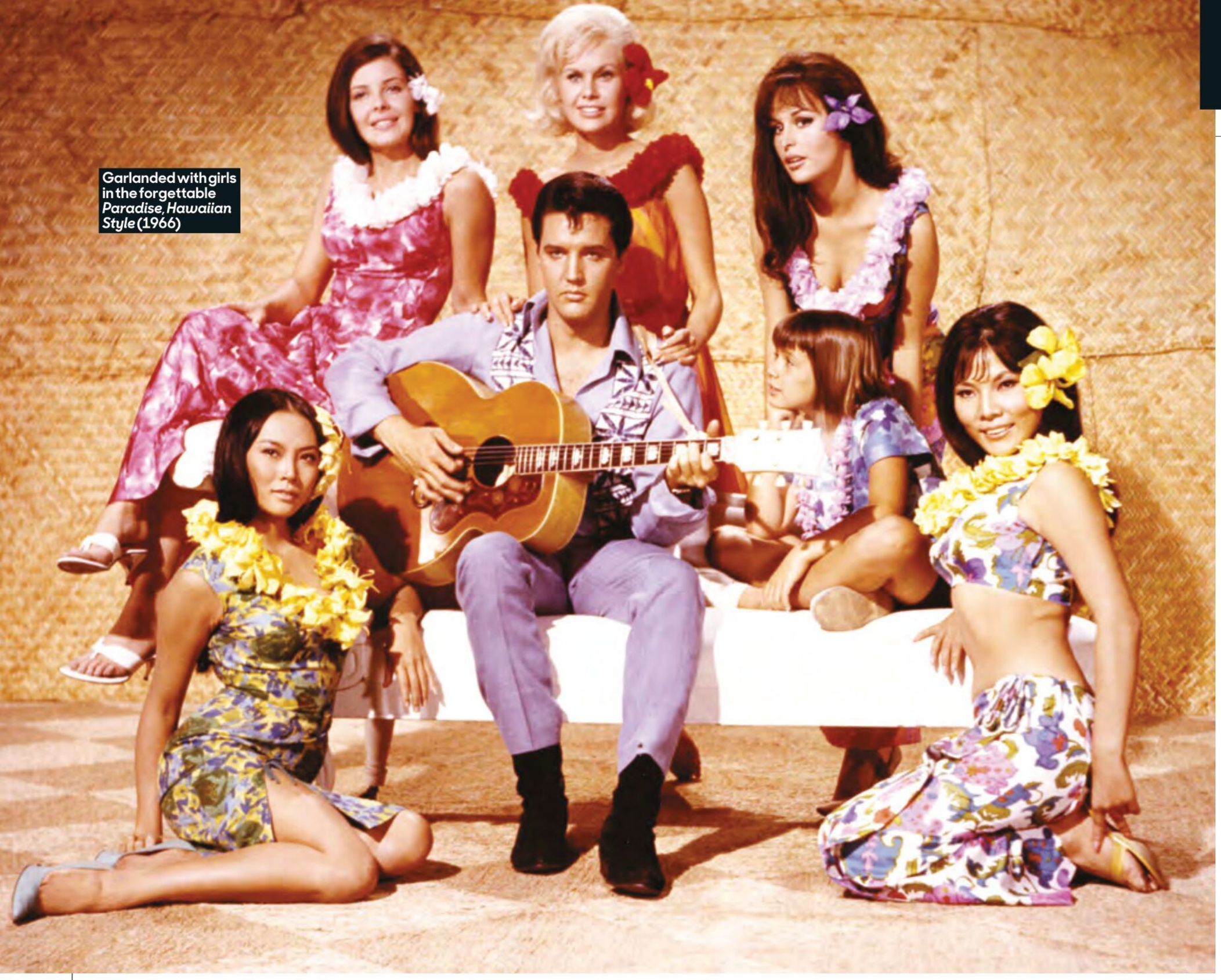
This inconsistent body of work occupies an odd place in Elvis's life and career. In biographies – including Peter Guralnick's excellent volumes and Baz Luhrmann's manic biopic – the films exist to show how far Colonel Tom Parker had led Elvis astray, ushering him away from the rock'n'roll he pioneered toward pop pap. They do little more than set him up for his triumphant '68 comeback, in which the leather-suited Tigerman absolutely obliterated the squeaky-clean pineapple heir he'd been playing for a decade. Elvis had thoroughly debased himself in Hollywood, but only so he could redeem himself later.

On the other hand, the films set the tone for his career in the 1970s, introducing many of the elements and themes that would define his later years. *Viva Las Vegas* began his long association with that city in Nevada, which culminated in an explosion of rhinestone jumpsuits, sweaty scarves, and karate kicks.

Lassoed into promoting *Girls! Girls! Girls!* (1962) and (inset) having a word with Edward Andrews in *The Trouble With Girls* (1969)



MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES; FILMPUBLICITYARCHIVE/UNITED ARCHIVES VIA GETTY IMAGES; EVERETT COLLECTIONINC / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO



Garlanded with girls in the forgettable *Paradise, Hawaiian Style* (1966)

CRITICS' VERDICTS

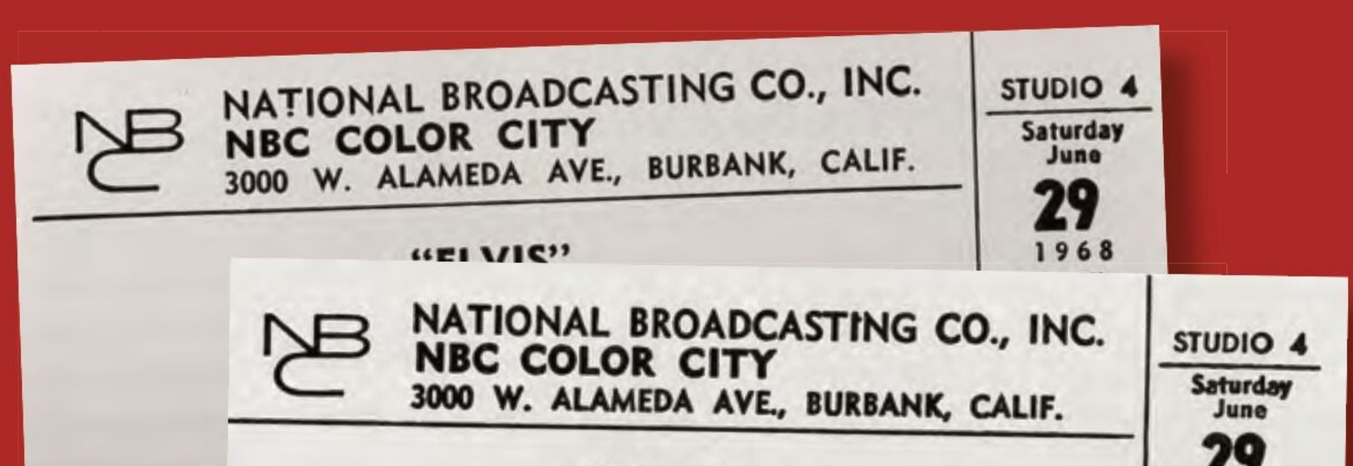
GIRLS! GIRLS! GIRLS!/FUN IN ACAPULCO/ ROUSTABOUT/ KISSIN' COUSINS

"What is unforgiveable is the way the music degenerated into throwaway pop songs and maudlin ballads which Elvis's great voice merely coasted through. From four albums, good songs are thin on the ground... there's one good album to be culled from four."
MICHAEL OLDFIELD, MELODY MAKER, 19/11/1977

★★★

“Something I really needed”

NME is there as Elvis changes from ageing movie star to rejuvenated rocker. No sooner has Nancy Sinatra revealed his on-set horseplay than he is charming the crowd on a landmark TV special. His comeback continues in 1969 in a new destination: Las Vegas. “We figured it was about time,” learns **ANN MOSES**. “I thought I had better do it before I got too old.”



MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

Back in black: Elvis recording the '68 Comeback Special in Los Angeles

NME | 1|6|1968

NANCY SINATRA is a flag-waver and you know it the minute you walk into her brand new Boots Enterprises office above the Sunset Strip. The big sofas are in red and white print, the carpeting is deep white pile, there's a huge American flag behind the bar and American-flag glasses to match, a blue table, and if all this isn't enough to get the idea across, behind her little round spectacles sits little Nancy in a terry-cloth red, white and blue mini-dress!

I walked in and spent the first few minutes eyeing the room while Nancy finished signing contracts. When she finished she greeted me warmly and explained that she'd just done a photo session and that this was the dress she always wore on her tours in Vietnam.

"I'm a flag-waver," she admitted. "I like everything in red, white and blue. I get tired of this anti-American stuff. I decided anyone who walks in here is going to know where I stand!"

After her secretary served us diet colas from the bar, we began talking about her forthcoming film, *Speedway*, in which she stars with Elvis Presley.

"IT'S funny," she laughed, "but I've done seven pictures and each one my agent has told me I shouldn't do it. Actually, Elvis and I knew nothing about doing this film together until MGM called my agent and asked if I would do the next Elvis picture. As usual, my agent advised me against it, because he says I should be doing movies like *Darling*. But I really wanted to do it because I knew the chemistry would be great between Elvis and me!

"I've known Elvis for over 10 years now. We did my dad's *Welcome Elvis Back* TV show together and after that it was like running into him here and there, phone calls, notes, wires – continual contact over the years. It was a friendship that built to the point that when we worked together it was such a great thing for both of us."

"Marvellous times": with Nancy Sinatra in *Speedway*

"It was sort of a family situation": Sgt Presley receives gifts from Nancy Sinatra on behalf of her dad, Frank, during a televised welcome home reception, 1960

It seemed odd to me, since everything in Elvis Presley's life has always been blown up, that at some time the movie magazines hadn't linked Nancy and Elvis romantically.

I found that was hardly the case when she told me: "You must remember our friendship started when my ex-husband [*Tommy Sands*] and Elvis were both managed by Colonel Tom Parker. They were very dear friends. It was sort of a family situation and it's grown that way over the years."

Their obvious closeness was not always appreciated by the director of *Speedway*. Nancy recalled to me: "We'd got so hysterical over things that we couldn't get through a scene for laughing so hard. One day the director got furious and threw everybody out and made us go home. We were unprofessional, I admit, but we couldn't help it!"

The hysterical moments didn't stop when the cameras stopped rolling, either. "Sometimes there would be hysterical scenes off the set when my stand-in and I would wrestle Elvis and his eight buddies! We'd be killing each other, romping all over the sound stage, laughing and screaming!

"And the practical jokes they'd play on me! Once they locked me in my dressing room and I'd hear the director calling for me for a shot and I couldn't get out. Very funny things like that. Marvellous!

"ANOTHER time Elvis and his buddies picked me up and threw me inside the hole under the makeup table. Then they took the cushions from the studio couches and stuffed them in front of me. I couldn't move and I could hardly breathe! I was screaming and yelling... funny practical jokes like that!" She couldn't help but laugh recalling it.

"The other way I met with Elvis was we'd have very serious talks about religion, meditation and things like that. He's more aware than any person I know. No, I take that back, because my father is really more aware than any person I know, but

FILMPUBLICITY ARCHIVE/UNITED ARCHIVES VIA GETTY IMAGES;BETTMANN/GETTY IMAGES

"IT WAS LIKE DOING A LOVE SCENE WITH YOUR BROTHER"

Nancy Sinatra on Speedway

Elvis is very much like my father. I don't mean aware of facts so much as I mean aware of people and feelings and thoughts."

I had assumed that because Elvis had been doing films for so many years that filmmaking would be pretty routine to him. Nancy was quick to correct me.

"He loves his work," she emphasised. "He's one of the few people I know who really enjoys life. When he's sad he's the saddest person in the world, and when he's happy he's the happiest person in the world. He experiences everything with great highs and lows.

"I just know that he's a very complex, deep-thinking man. He's got great ESP. He's really on a very high plane. But people don't understand this, they don't realise it because they don't know him. He's never really allowed people to get to know him."

Nancy mentioned that she specially enjoyed meeting Elvis's wife, Priscilla, who visited the set often. She remembers the day Elvis announced that he was a father-to-be and they all celebrated with champagne.

It was Nancy, in fact, who gave Priscilla her baby shower, a private party to which close friends and relatives were invited. There was even a hired policeman at Nancy's front gate to keep out the press and the fans who inevitably show up.

Even though El had dated Priscilla on and off for several years, Nancy had never met her, probably because Priscilla lived in Nashville. Now she says: "Priscilla is a groove! They are so great those two... they look like something off the top of a wedding cake. She's so tiny, just five feet one, and he's like six feet three, but they're so marvellous together."

In *Speedway*, Nancy and Elvis hate each other and fight throughout the flick. In the end they do get together in a love scene, a scene that almost wasn't put on film! The reason?

"We could hardly stop laughing! It was like doing a love scene with your brother. Trying to keep a straight face was impossible."

The scene was eventually shot and Nancy admitted she was pleased with the end result. "It's a fun film. It's an entertainment movie and if audiences will take it for what it is, they'll enjoy it. I think I'm all right in it except for my speaking voice. I got very tense in trying to keep a straight face and trying to get through the scenes, so my voice, as it does with most performers, went up. Apart from that, I think the performance is good, the chemistry between Elvis and I is good and the film is good."

With the great success of Nancy's first television special, *Movin' With Nancy*, Boots Enterprises, her production company, has really kept her busy. Boots began when Nancy got tired of having business meetings in her home nearly 24 hours a day. Today they are conducted in plush offices, where a fast-growing business is developing.

"Eventually I hope to be a figurehead, to be out of it and have someone else run the business for me. Right now I'm very involved in it because I'm the only thing in Boots that's saleable right now. I want to sign other artists, to develop new talent, and that way eventually get out of the business end.

"I'm working so hard at it right now because I don't want to dissipate what I've done. It would be a crime to waste it all. So many people, girls in particular, attain a certain amount of success and then they get married, get pregnant and they let it all kind of fizzle out.

"I don't want to continue the actual physical work of it when I'm married and pregnant, except on very special occasions. But if I establish it and give it a good foundation now, when I do get out it will run on and keep building. That's what I want. I don't know if it can be done, but I'm going to try."

MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

"NOT JUST COUNTRY SONGS"

Meeting MAC DAVIS, the writer of "In The Ghetto"

LAST week, another Presley songwriter arrived in London: Texas-born Mac Davis. He too plays guitar and sings solo – just like Jerry Reed. But he has an even bigger string of Presley songs to his credit. Among them the massive "In The Ghetto". Altogether, El has recorded "about 10 of my songs", says Mac.

"I co-wrote 'Memories' for Elvis with Billy Strange. We did it for a TV spectacular. But 'In The Ghetto' was the big one. It hit No 1 and sold over a million. I was certainly very happy about that song.

"I'd had it in mind to write a song of this type for a long time. I'd been thinking about those kids who live in the ghetto, grow up there, wind up in a vicious circle, and no-one cares. As a matter of fact, 'In The Ghetto' was originally subtitled 'The Vicious Circle'.

"I had taped about 12 songs for Elvis. He recorded the first five, and one was 'In The Ghetto'. Another was 'Don't Cry Daddy'.

"There are three more from that tape not released yet. For obvious reasons I can't tell you the titles.

"How did I get into songwriting? Well, I started whistling when I was four or five years old.

"Then, 10 or 11 years ago, when I was about 18, I formed a rock'n'roll band out of Atlanta, Georgia.

"Then I got married when I was about 20 and worked with a record company as a promotion man. The company – it doesn't exist now – was Veejay. They had the first Beatles album released in America.

"I worked for them for four-and-a-half years, then I went to Liberty Records and travelled all over the country.

"But all the time I kept on writing songs. And I got people to listen to me playing and singing them. Then, two years ago, I broke out on my own as a songwriter. Since then I've had six Top 20 records in the States."

Apart from his work for Elvis, Mac Davis wrote "Something's Burning" for Kenny Rogers & The First Edition. He's also written songs for OC Smith, Lou Rawls and Andy Williams. His song "You Are" is on the new Andy Williams album.

"I don't write just country songs," says Mac. "I do anything from ballads to rock'n'roll.

"A song I wrote with Delaney Bramlett, 'Hello LA, Bye Bye Birmingham', has had 14 different versions recorded. But it hasn't been a hit yet."

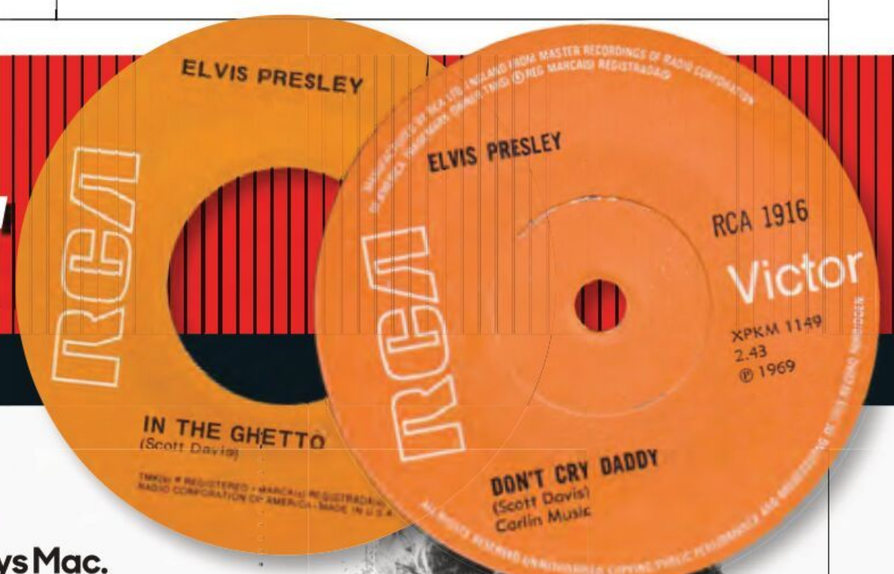
The latest to do it is Nancy Sinatra.

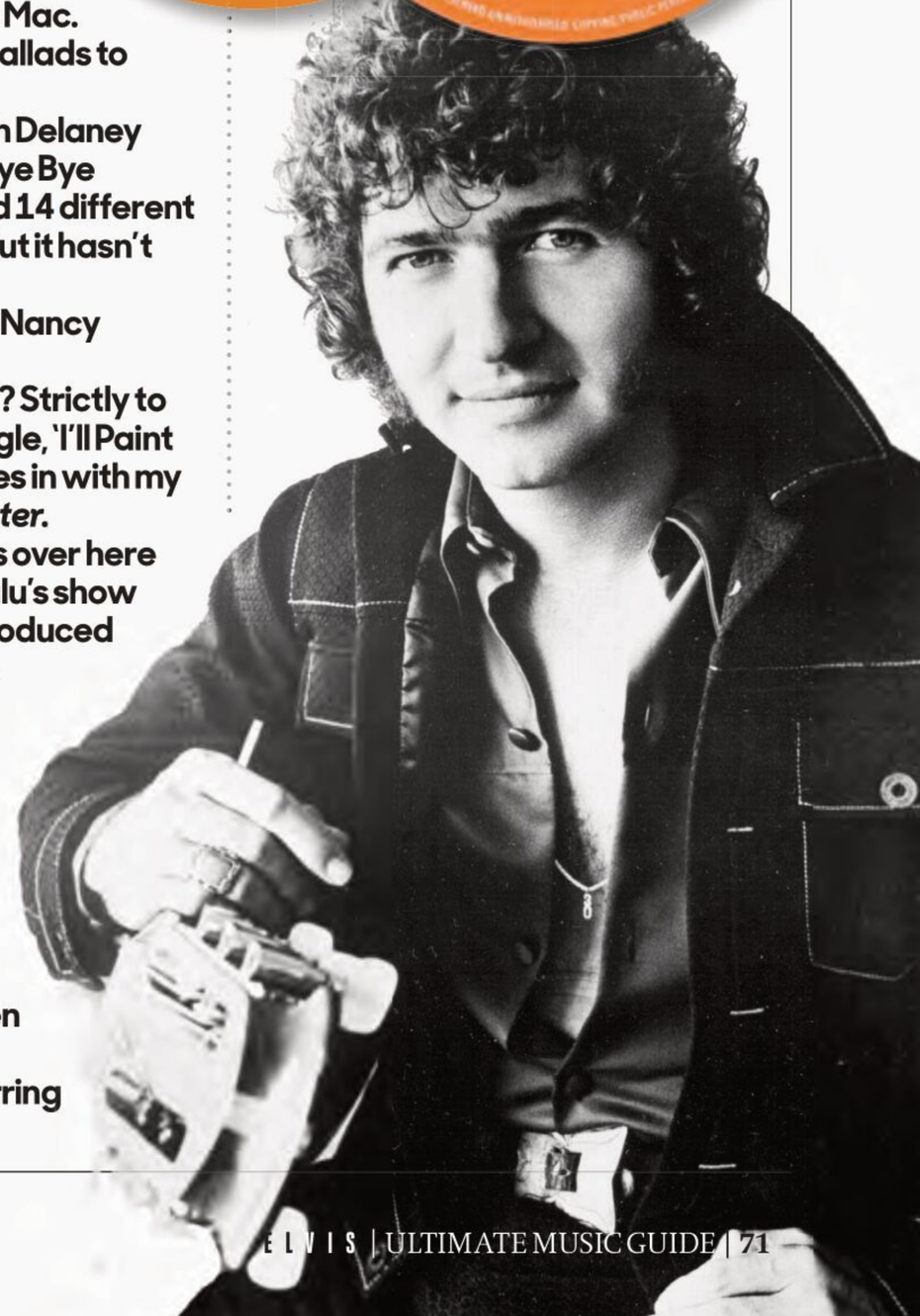
"Why am I in Britain? Strictly to promote my new single, 'I'll Paint You A Song', which ties in with my album *The Song Painter*.

"I have three shows over here – *Top Of The Pops*, Lulu's show and a BBC special produced by Stanley Dorfman.

"Your *Top Of The Pops* is better than anything we have in the States, by the way."

And, just to keep that movie song scene going, Mac Davis has also written five songs for Glen Campbell's new starring film, *Norwood*.





"ELVIS IS A VERY COMPLEX, DEEP-THINKING MAN. HE'S GOT GREAT ESP"

Nancy Sinatra

IT was like having the power to turn back the clock 10 years. As I sat on the TV stage steps, only five feet away from the King while he gyrated, twisted and glided through his early hits, looking tender, or cruel, or loving, or mean as he sang through the lyrics, it was as though I was watching El's first appearance on *The Ed Sullivan Show* way back. I became a Presley fan – 10 years late!

Let me tell you about the exciting night I had with Elvis. He spent most of a week taping his first TV special in eight years at the NBC studios in Burbank, near Hollywood.

He had rehearsed for two weeks before that. By Saturday night, the second-to-last night of taping, the NBC cameras had captured Elvis in over 40 hours of tape, which would be clipped to fit the one-hour special aired to America on December 3.

Let me say I have never been an avid Elvis fan – until now. I had seen several of his movies, which I enjoyed without going overboard about them, and the only LPs I have were sent for reviewing by RCA. Yet when the head of RCA publicity called and asked if I wanted tickets for Elvis's taping, I jumped at the chance. I mean – he is the King and it would be a royal occasion!

I waited outside the studio for over two hours. They were still rehearsing and no audience was allowed in. This was to be the second night of taping with an audience. Many big production numbers had been taped already without an audience, but with many dancers in them.

As we (about 200) entered the studio, we gazed upon a 15 foot square platform with three steps leading up to it. This was surrounded on three sides by seats going up about seven rows, so that even the farthest fan was very close. The fourth side was filled by the orchestra.

We were seated and after about 15 minutes, when the place was full, in came Priscilla with four friends, to sit right behind me! I could dig it! The pictures I had seen of her made her look rather hard, but in person she was so petite and lovely I could hardly keep from staring. Her hair hung softly on her shoulders. She wore a smart, short black and white dress. And she was so tiny!

She talked with the people close to her and she seemed to be smiling every minute. I couldn't get over her natural loveliness. I heard the friend next to her say: "Aren't you going back to see the old man?" She laughed and told him Elvis had said not to come back before the show because there would be too much hassle in the dressing room for her.

And I was one of the lucky ones to sit on the steps.

The square platform was covered by four cameras. One directly overhead, two on opposite corners and one roving camera. We were seated and in a matter of seconds the producer was saying, "Ladies and gentlemen... Mr Elvis Presley."

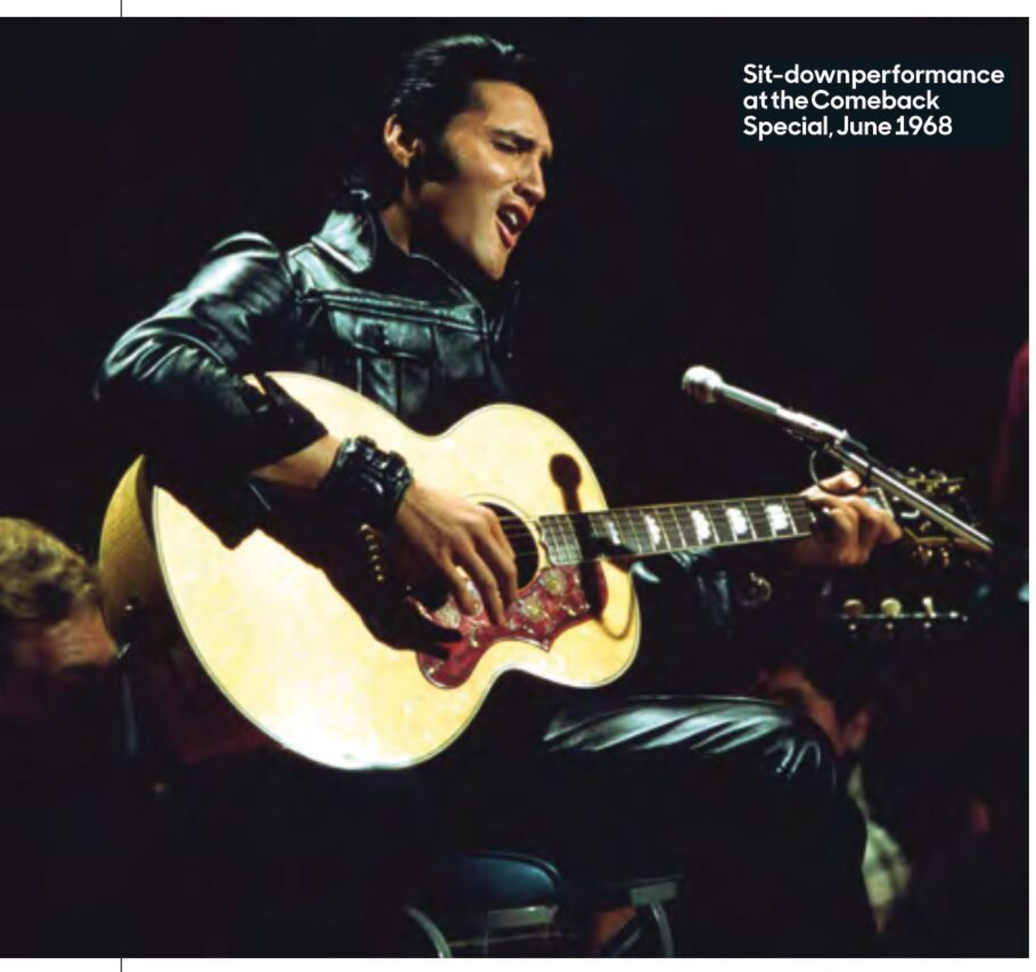
It was almost too much at first. Without warning, there stood Elvis, the legend and the man slimmer than I have seen him in the past few pictures. He was dressed from head to toe in black leather. His coal black hair was combed back, thick and shiny. He stepped on to the platform and grabbed the guitar from his friend, Lance. His skin was smooth with only a touch of makeup. He looked 21 years old!

His first line on the cue card read: "Well, I'm gonna have to do this sooner or later, so here goes..." The band struck a note... Elvis parted his feet in that personal stance... and then it began... "*You ain't nothing but a hound dog...*" The time machine was working well.

From there he went through "Blue Suede Shoes", "Don't Be Cruel", "Heartbreak Hotel", "Jailhouse Rock". In between numbers there would be a slight pause for him to walk around the platform or smile at one of us below or move into a different stance. The presence he commanded is indescribable!

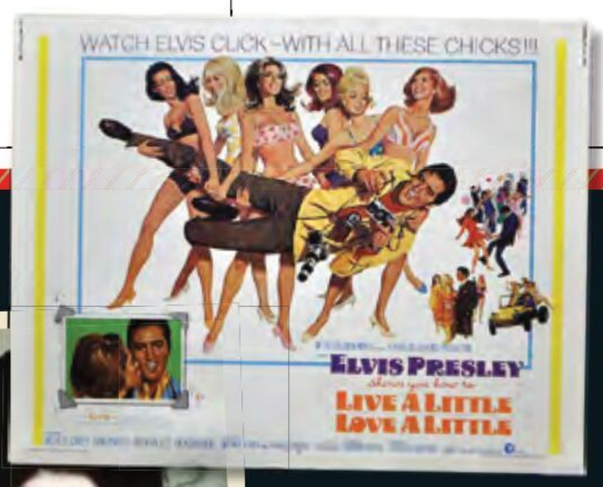
There he was! You could tell he was aware of his power. When he'd bend down in a sudden jerk to sing one line of a song to the girl seated there, he knew that look and that scream would come. It has been eight years since Elvis has performed these songs live, yet every movement, every twist, every bump, every look – was smooth, so precise, so compelling. You could feel the impact... oh how you could feel it!

What I did realise as I was watching him go through the numbers was that he was very aware of the power he possesses. He was playing his very famous


Sit-downperformance at the Comeback Special, June 1968

MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

ABOUT this time the executive producer came out and explained that for this particular sequence he needed people to sit on the surrounding steps of the platform. Hands darted up all around the audience, but he told them he would just walk around and choose the ones he wanted.



TIMELINE THE COMEBACK

Plans are afoot to hit pause on the King's movie career and launch his return to the stage – with a special live show to be broadcast nationwide live from Las Vegas.

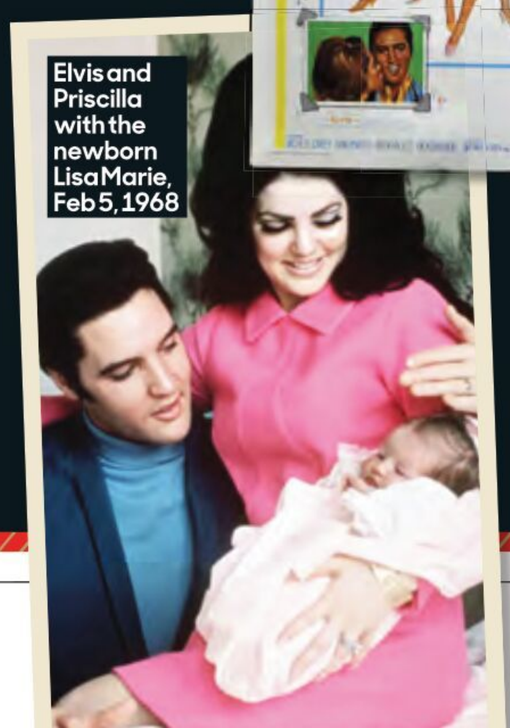
1968

January

NBC-TV VP Tom Sarnoff announces the *1968 Elvis Christmas Special*, sponsored by Singer sewing machines. A disillusioned Presley sees this as Parker's plan to force him into making another Christmas LP.

February

1 Lisa Marie is born in Baptist Hospital, Memphis, exactly nine months after Elvis and Priscilla's wedding. Soon after, Elvis and family head to Trousdale Estates, California, to shoot *Live A Little, Love A Little*.


Elvis and Priscilla with the newborn Lisa Marie, Feb 5, 1968

BETTMANN/GETTY IMAGES

May

Producer Bob Finkel persuades the Colonel to change the '68 special. Director Steve Binder tells Elvis a Christmas show would "finish him forever". The pair write a brief based around "Guitar Man" and commission new songs including "If I Can Dream". Elvis approves the black leather suit designed by Bill Belew,

Monochrome set: between songs at the filming in Burbank, California, June 27, 1968

game. He knows how to look sexy, or cruel, or tender, and after many of his seasoned movements you could catch the slightest smile, because he knows. I think, too, that there was a subdued delight inside of him that he was getting the very same reaction he knew so many years ago. He knew he still had the power!

WHAT amazed me was the audience reaction. If there had been 200 viewers who had been Elvis fans since the days of "Hound Dog" then I would expect the reaction he got. But no, there were old women, grown men, teenagers, children – every age was there and they were all "freaking out" over The King. Sex made no difference, either, the boys were just as eager to touch and get near him as the girls.

At one point he was singing the song "Evil" in which he sings the line "*I'm only made out of flesh, blood and bone...*" but I recall thinking at the time and I still feel that there is more to Elvis than that... there's a touch of magic, too.

He sang a few more of the old greats like "Love Me Tender" and "Can't Help Falling In Love". His voice, so smooth and perfect, was more beautiful than I have ever heard it on record. With many artists the studio techniques enhance their voices, but with Elvis, I've never heard his voice sound as warm as it does in person.

The final number of this particular segment, which had so far lasted about half an hour and would comprise only about 10 minutes of the special, Elvis sang a new song called "My Dream". It's the most potent ballad I've ever heard him do.

The lyrics speak of brothers walking hand in hand, love, peace, and then they ask, "*If I can walk and talk and dream, why can't my dream come true right now?*" With Elvis singing those words, pleading to make his dream come true so sincerely, the song takes on even added dimensions and becomes a true experience.

As Elvis left the stage, his face dripping with perspiration, his straight hair hanging over his eyes after such an energetic half-hour workout, everyone expected the end had – too soon – arrived.

Wrong! After a few moments the executive producer appeared to inform us that this had been a dress rehearsal and Elvis would be back as soon as his leather suit dried out, and go through it all again.

It was great news, because to have a small taste of greatness would have been cruel. The first set whet our appetites and the gathering was openly happy that the appetite might now be satisfied (if that's possible)!

During the half-hour break, Priscilla Presley, Elvis's wife, descended from the seats where she was watching him and glided backstage to see her husband. She did not return.

Meantime, the executive producer stayed on stage to entertain the audience by answering questions about El. I asked how much he had contributed to the creation of the TV Special. The producer said El had done about 75 per cent of the creating. He also said El was easy to work with and his professionalism had cut the time allowed for filming.

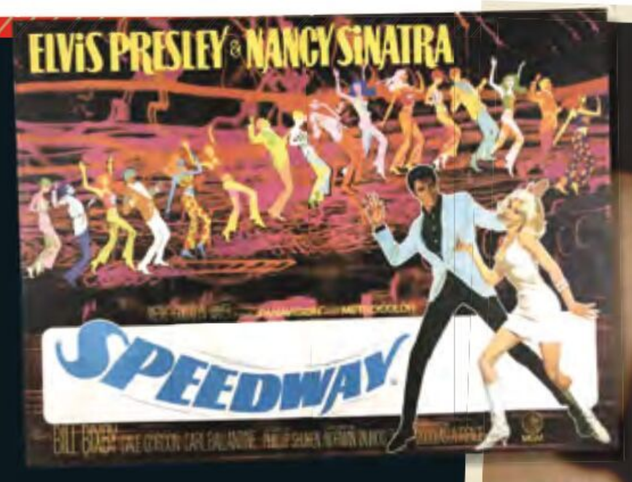
To fill time and keep us occupied, as if we weren't content to merely sit and wait for him to return, the producer called The Blossoms on stage to do a song. This girl trio, who performed on the old *Shindig* show and have aided the Righteous Brothers on their tours, backed up Elvis vocally in the Special.

THERE WERE OLD WOMEN, GROWN MEN, TEENAGERS, CHILDREN, ALL FREAKING OUT OVER 'THE KING'

who will design Elvis's stage gear until his death.

June

12 *Speedway* premieres. It will gross $3m in 1968.
17 Rehearsals begin for the TV special. Binder suggests bringing in Scotty Moore and DJ Fontana for two improvised "jam and chat" sessions, interspersed throughout the show. It is a stroke of genius.



27–30 The show is taped. Although Elvis is nervous, it doesn't show and his first public performances for nearly 10 years are triumphant.

Go western: Elvis Presley on the set of *Charro!*

July

22 Elvis moves to Arizona to shoot grim western *Charro!*, the only film in which he is not seen singing.

September

28 Dewey Phillips, the DJ who first played Elvis on the air, dies. He is 42.

December

3 The Comeback Special airs. Following an aggressive PR campaign by the Colonel, it is watched by 54 million viewers. Having reconnected with his love of live performance, Elvis starts to talk of touring again.

MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES; SUNSET BOULEVARD/CORBIS VIA GETTY IMAGES

A life story in song: performer and invite-only audience in Burbank, LA

"We'd like to sing a gospel song for you," one of the girls said.

"You know, Elvis really loves gospel songs. Every time we've had a break in the past two weeks he drags us off to some corner to sing gospel tunes. Isn't that a groove?" she went on.

Then they sang a gospel tune and it was a groove too. I would have loved to hear Elvis join with them, but anyway...

A few more minutes, in which the executive producer introduced all of Elvis's buddies and then he was back. This time he was much more at ease in front of the audience. He began to joke with those of us close by, sitting on the platform.

"I hope you don't mind if we do a few of those numbers again," he smiled, "I really goofed up some of them the last time."

The band was ready and it began again. But this time seemed even more exciting because it was like we knew him better. That may seem hard to comprehend, since we'd only been there a couple of hours, but that's the way he makes you feel!

SOME of the songs had been recorded previously and when he'd get to them in the medley he just cut up the original lyric. Like when "Love Me Tender" came around again he sang: "...*You have made my life a wreck and I hate you so*..." Then he'd laugh and go on to the next tune.

Once through the whole medley and everything stopped for a prop change. A special set had to be set up for the finale. Instead of leaving this time, Elvis bent down to me (are you ready for that – me!) and said, "What would you like to hear?"

I blurted out, "Your Time Hasn't Come Yet, Baby". He gave me an inquisitive look and I said: "The new single."

"Right," he said and started singing the song.

> **"WE'LL DO A FEW NUMBERS AGAIN. I REALLY GOOFED UP SOME OF THEM THE LAST TIME"**
> *Elvis during recording*

The microphone was turned off. He called to have someone turn it on. Another girl said, "Sing 'US Male'," and he said in a deep voice "*I'm a US male*..." but still the mic was off.

Others were calling out songs now and while he waited for someone to turn on the mic he bent down to sign some autographs. He got back up and strummed the electric guitar and tried again, but still no sound. So he left.

It's really awful to complain in light of what we were all experiencing, but to think we would have had a private little 15-minute concert except for that rotten dead mic, well... it would have been groovy.

The set was ready. It was a black box some 25 feet long and as high and wide as a room. At one

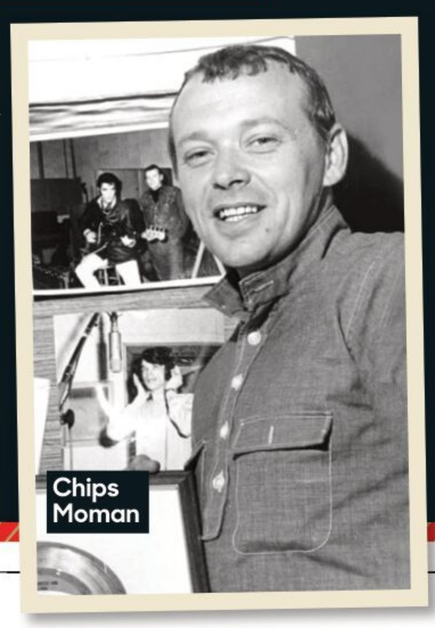
TIMELINE THE COMEBACK

Riding a wave of confidence after the success of the Comeback Special, Elvis finds a new lease of life both in the studio and on the Las Vegas stage...

1969

January

13 Elvis records new sessions at the American Studio in Memphis with producer Chips Moman. "In The Ghetto" and "Suspicious Minds"



Chips Moman

are two of the highlights.

February

26 Parker inks a $500,000 deal for a four-week residency at the International in Vegas. Elvis returns to American for more sessions.

March

Charro! is released, to abysmal reviews and flat box office.

May

From Elvis In Memphis released.

June

"In The Ghetto" becomes Elvis's first Top 10 hit since 1965.

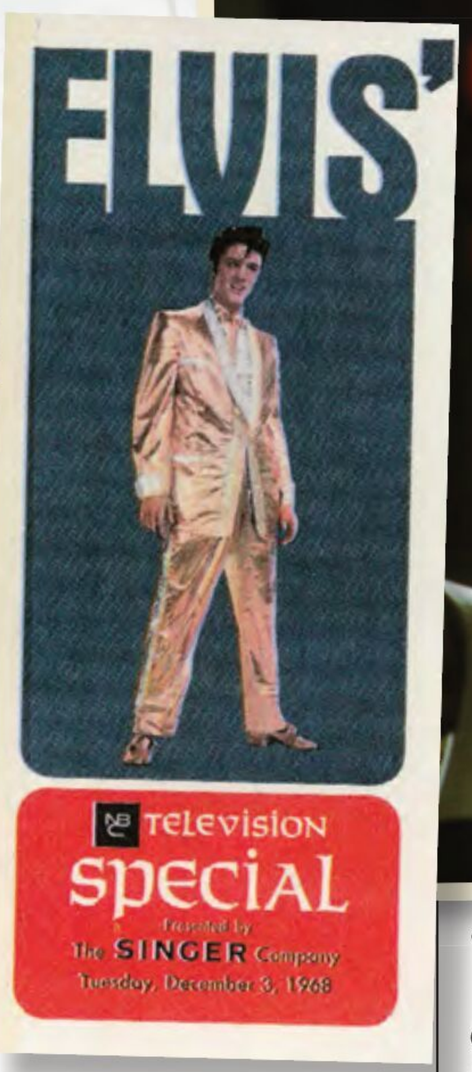
July

26 Elvis's first performance at the 2,000-seater International. Cary

MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

God save the King: Elvis sings with the Blossoms during the Comeback Special

All white on the night: Mr Presley emotes after another change of costume



end there were flashing coloured lights darting in all directions. At the open end was our platform and the microphone.

Elvis returned, casually, but things were not quite ready. The mic was on now. Someone asked "How's your daughter?" "Oh, about this long," he held his hands out about a foot apart as he smiled broadly.

"How long have I got?" he questioned the director, "I'm getting embarrassed."

There was no answer, so he began singing "Tiptoe Through The Tulips" in Tiny Tim style. It was hilarious and even he couldn't help breaking into laughter. "Well, how about... '*someone left the cake out in the rain*'..." He was now mimicking, in an extra-deep voice, Richard Harris's hit record "MacArthur Park". Again he laughed.

Everything was ready now. He took that special stance and glared at the camera. The music started... "*If you're lookin' for trouble... you come to the right place*". Rough and tough, he was singing "Trouble", twitching lip and all! But then he called, "Wait, wait..." and the tape stopped.

He looked at us and said: "Did you see that?" He was laughing again. "I got my lip caught on the microphone!" He'd goofed the famous lip twitch. Of course, it had to be right. It all started again and this time it was perfect.

In the middle of "Trouble" the tape broke into "Guitar Man" with Elvis singing, "*Well, I've come a long way from the car-wash...*" and he sings about heading back down the road with a guitar slung over his back. He picks up his guitar, slings it over his back and walks off down the black corridor into the flashing lights symbolising the future.

The audience was hysterical and that's good because the reaction is all on tape too. It was so spontaneous and so beautiful. What I gather the special is all about is sort of a life story of Elvis through his music, ending of course, with him walking into the unknown future, that for him can only get better. All I can say is I didn't sleep for two nights and I'm still having dreams – I guess that's what can happen when you're touched by magic!

Elvis held the first press conference he has had for several years. Asked at it why he was doing the TV show, he drawled: "We figured it was about time. Besides, I thought I had better do it before I got too old." He chuckled as he said this.

Colonel Parker was present and was a bit more serious. "We had a very good deal," he added, "and NBC, who do the TV, also are making a picture with Elvis starring."

Asked what he mostly did in the TV special, Elvis said: "I sing almost exclusively, and I sing the songs I'm known for."

"Hell, if he sang the songs he's known for," interrupted the Colonel, "that would take a couple of hours. NBC only gave us an hour. He is going to sing some of the songs he's famous for."

Elvis said he thought his fans had changed some. "Now my fans are young mothers and girls about to get married."

He said he insisted the cameras keep on him most of the time in the special.

When asked if he wrote songs, Elvis answered: "All I've written is two lines of 'Love Me Tender', and that was a while ago."

And finally to the question "Is Priscilla expecting another child?" he answers a definite "No".

AS Elvis Presley smashed his way to No 1 this week with "In The Ghetto", a big question mark hangs over the British showing of his American TV production.

This is the NBC-TV spectacular exclusively screened for the *MM* and fully reported in our issue of July 5.

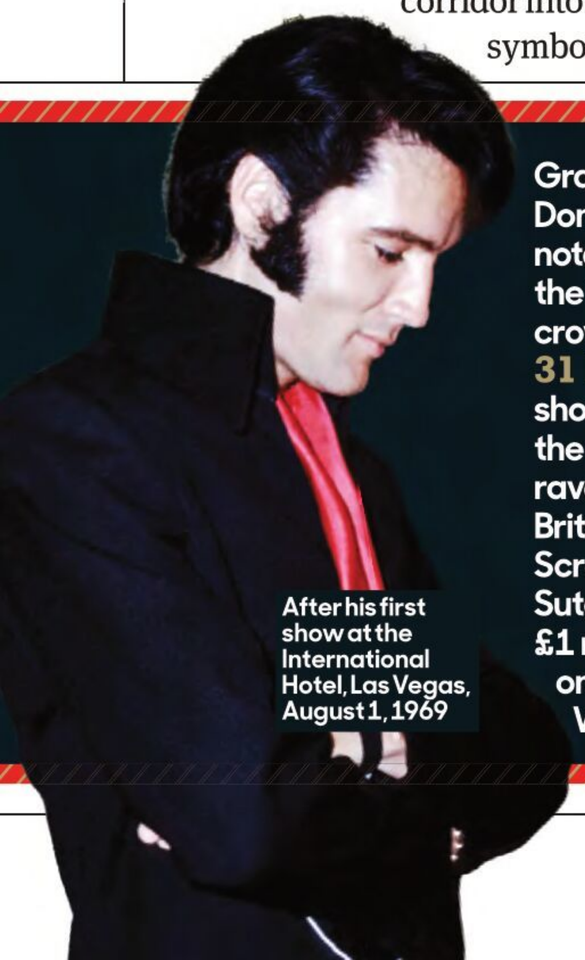
Prints of the film have been made available to ITV and to the BBC, who have expressed an interest in buying the show. The Elvis Presley Fan Club long ago mounted a massive campaign to persuade the BBC to buy the film, which was first shown in the States before Christmas.

Peter Marriott, the NBC-TV executive in Britain, admitted to the *MM* on Monday that there were "problems" over negotiations for the sale of the film. "This is not an ordinary run-of-the-mill show," he said. "But I will bet you a bottle of champagne it will be screened either by ITV or the BBC before the end of the year."

Added Mr Marriott: "Negotiations take time. A high price is involved. We're not selling a can of peas." Mr Marriott said he had not heard that ITV had turned down the film – an unconfirmed report which reached the *MM* on Monday. "Negotiations are still going on," he said.

A BBC spokesman said on Monday: "We are still talking." The *MM* understands that the high price of the production has caused the long delay.

Meanwhile, "In The Ghetto" has sold a quarter-of-a-million. And the album from which the single was taken – *Elvis In Memphis* – will be released at the beginning of August.



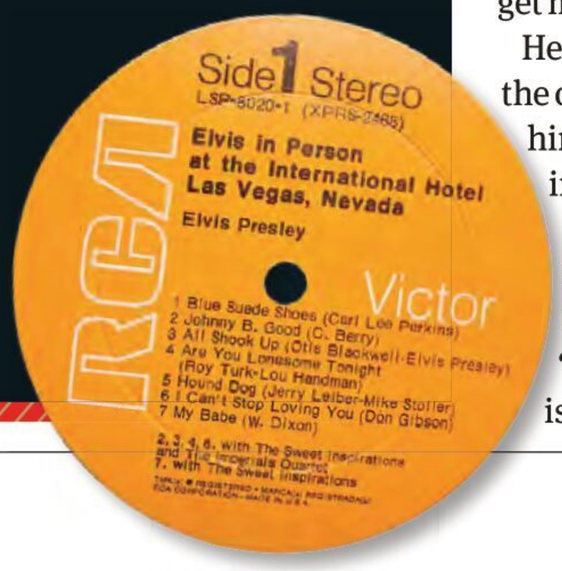
After his first show at the International Hotel, Las Vegas, August 1, 1969

November

Grant and Fats Domino are notable faces in the invitation-only crowd.

31 Elvis's Vegas shows open to the public and rave reviews. Britain's Screaming Lord Sutch offers Elvis £1 million to play one night at Wembley.

Double album *From Memphis To Vegas/ From Vegas To Memphis* is released.



MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGE

"THE HEAT IS REALLY ON!"

Elvis Live at the International Hotel, Las Vegas

LIVE!

NME | 9|8|1969

ELVIS live again! And I was there to see it for you! I'm so excited my hands are trembling on the typewriter keys and my mind is awhirl. I only hope I can do justice to this historic occasion – Elvis back on a stage, giving a live performance, after so many years.

His tremulous singing, his throbbing voice, his carefree gags, his panther-like, black-clad figure, slimmed by six weeks of strenuous rehearsals, his bodily animal grace... these are the things that are making me tremble!

It's not often a writer is truly inspired and yet so excited it's hard to write! As much as I would love to produce flowing journalistic prose to describe to you the show that I have both witnessed and taken part in (so to speak, since every member of Elvis's audience is part of his show), I will instead just try to relate to you, as fast as my fingers will carry me over the page, what I have seen tonight.

We'll skip the all-day excitement that has preceded this evening and the sleepless night that preceded that. We'll pass over briefly the fine pre-show by the Sweet Inspirations (though it was excellent) and comic Sammy Shore (who was also great). We'll skip them because I can't wait to tell you all about Elvis.

I spotted him before my husband. Just before the loudspeaker echoed his name, there he was in the wings. Then, in just a moment, he sauntered on to the stage, a slim, black, lithe-like figure. Yes, sauntered... not in an unconcerned manner, but more in a shy way... with that feeling of uncertainty. Remember, it's been over nine years.

The band (a superb one led by Bobby Morse) struck up "Blue Suede Shoes" and Elvis was rocking behind his guitar. It was loud and strong, commanding the room's attention and convincing even the most sceptical (and there were some) that The King was now on stage.

Behind us an old gentleman bounced in his seat and said: "I'll give him three hundred more points than Barbra Streisand," to which my husband replied: "Four hundred, at least!" The old gentleman answered back: "You're damn right!"

The song was over. Elvis took deep breaths and even THEY drew applause. People were just digging the way The Man worked out! He sipped some nearby water. He was into position again, not a manoeuvred pose, but more a comfortable stance where he could shake it the best.

"I Got A Woman" he sang and sang and sang. Backed by the Sweet Inspirations and the Imperials, a male quartet, Elvis shook the last vestiges of the people sitting calmly by.

More breaths and sips and everyone seemed to be breathing hard right along with him. The lights dimmed, but only a little, thank goodness, and Elvis sang "Love Me Tender". "*Love me tender... love my...*" the lyrics were a little different and the crowd went wild.

This wasn't the "Double Trouble" goody-goody Elvis; this was the Las Vegas Elvis and, we'd all like to think, the down-home Elvis, like when he's not in front of an audience. That's how it seemed to be, anyway.

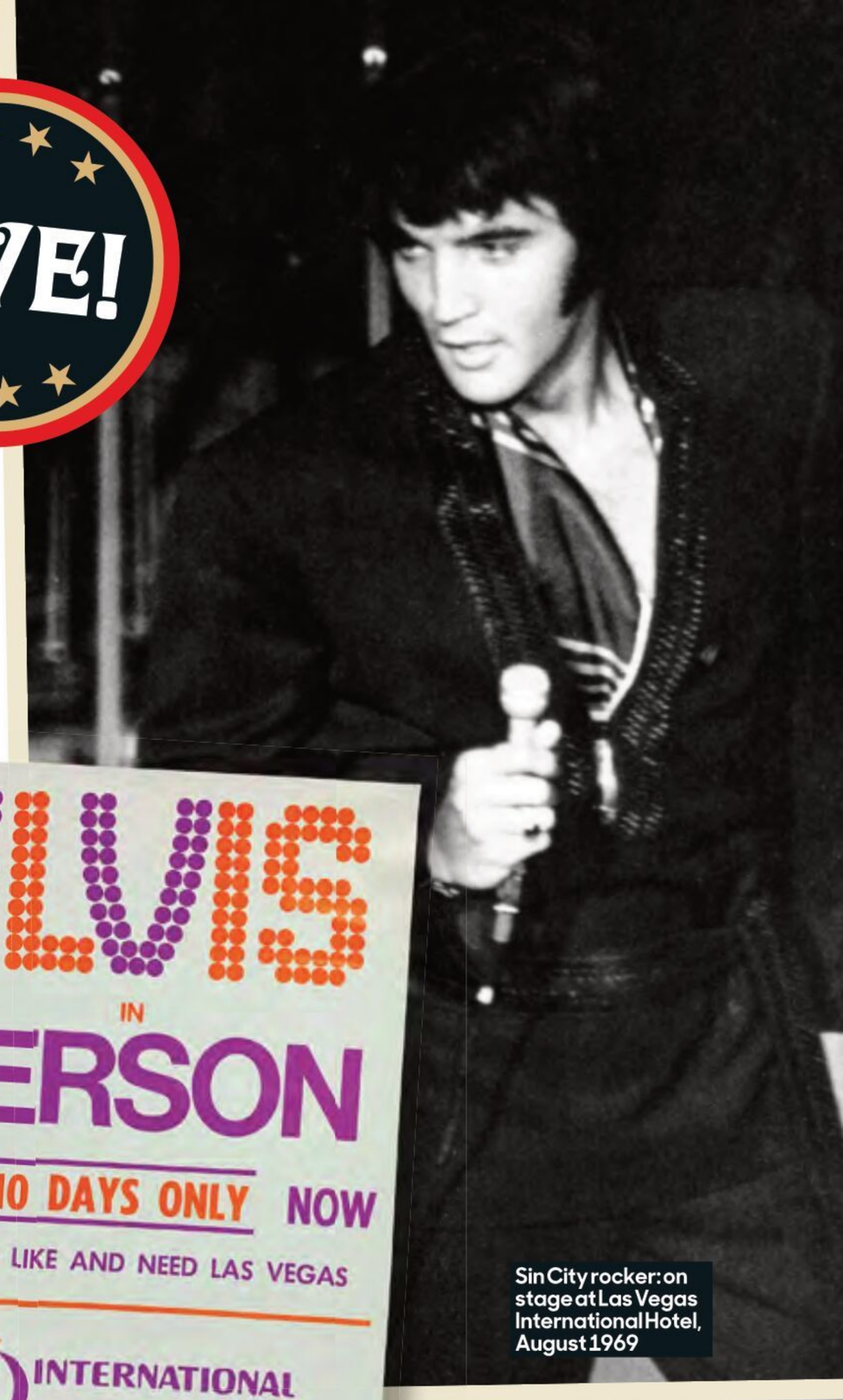
He took a minute between songs. "The heat is really on," he chuckled as he wiped his forehead. It was on! Everyone was watching with squinted eyes, but there was no sweat. He had the situation under control.

Next was the medley... one after another they came... his favourites and ours: "Jailhouse Rock", "Don't Be Cruel", "Heartbreak Hotel", "All Shook Up" and "Hound Dog". Not always as we'd heard them so many times on record... a few lyric changes for added spice here and there, but all the essential qualities, like Elvis singing them. Before the last one, he kidded us with; "This is the only song. I could think of that really expresses my feelings toward the audience," and broke into "Hound Dog"!

The tempo slowed and Elvis went into "Memories". It was beautiful, just like on his TV special. He walked slowly across the stage and back. His black tunic-topped outfit skimmed his slimmer-than-usual body. He commented later in the show that rehearsing for six weeks had made him lose several pounds.

Elvis' patter between numbers seemed so relaxed and the audience rapport was amazing. Elvis glanced at the floor; "It says BS here, do you think they're trying to tell me something?... Oh, maybe it stands for Barbra Streisand." The crowd roared.

From here the tempo went back up and he was into "My Babe" that we'd heard before from the Righteous Brothers, but never quite like this. Elvis The Pelvis seemed a little more mature in his present act than in the one we had seen him doing in *Jailhouse Rock*, for example. None of the fire was gone; just a refining of the hip- shakin'. There seemed so much more to his show now than then.



Sin City rocker: on stage at Las Vegas International Hotel, August 1969

FRANK EDWARDS/FOTOS INTERNATIONAL/ARCHIVE PHOTOS/GETTY IMAGES, FOTOS INTERNATIONAL/GETTY IMAGES

"ONE OF THESE DAYS IT WILL ALL CATCH UP WITH ME AND I'LL PROBABLY FALL APART"
Elvis Presley

Sign of the times: the King's residency is announced outside the International, Las Vegas, August 1969

He was moving now, without the guitar, just a hand mic, and you could see all of him. He was really putting it to the audience and they were giving it all back in enthusiasm. Even "I Can't Stop Loving You", which followed, was more up-tempo than the record. The pace throughout the whole show was fast, furious and just the way the audience craved it.

"I'd like to do my latest release; it's been a big seller for me," Elvis introduced, adding shyly: "Something I really needed!" The strings identified "In The Ghetto". It was moving and soulful.

He then surprised us with his next release, due out in about two weeks, called "Suspicious Minds". It's a great song, a sure hit, and Elvis put all he had into it.

What was amazing throughout the show is that there was not one slip, or miss or mistake. Just smoothness all the way.

Elvis did two Beatle songs. Can Elvis sing "Yesterday" better than Paul McCartney? Yes!

What about "Hey Jude"? Yes, again!

But what was even more exciting than Elvis SINGING The Beatles, was Elvis moving and shaking to The Beatles.

He felt the songs and you could tell. In fact, all he sang of "Hey Jude" were the words "*hey Jude*" and all the "*da, da, da da da das*", but still, it was for me the most exciting version yet!

"Johnny B Goode" was next, and by this time the audience was, naturally, calling out songs they'd like to hear. Elvis smiled politely but went into his prepared next number. Although these were probably written on a list and very carefully rehearsed, this took away not one ounce of spontaneity from the performance. For the first couple of numbers, though poised, Elvis had a twinge of nervousness. Now that was visibly past and he was performing for 2,000 of his FRIENDS. You could see it!

It's not hard to imagine that rounds and rounds of applause followed the first couple of words in each number. Every song, save his new one, was familiar and loved. "Train Ride" and "Tiger Man" followed. I can remember thinking, I wished he'd stop with the lyrics, "*Well, I'm The King...*" instead of going on to sing "*...of the jungle, they call me tiger man*". But we all know he's The King, anyway!

The last number had come too soon. Elvis had actually been on stage over an hour! The final song was "What'd I Say" and everything happened on this number. He was wringing the microphone, shaking his legs, punching with his fists. Everything was moving and his voice was screaming out the lyrics!

Almost before the song had completely ended he walked off the stage to a standing ovation. He returned in seconds and the house lights were turned up so that he could see every person who was standing up in tribute to the King.

His encore number was "Can't Help Falling In Love". There was little else to say, little description left, except to say – pray this be the start of a trend for Elvis, that the world might share this incredible talent!

Elvis speaks!

Highlights of his press conference

NME | 9|8|1969

IF Elvis Presley has his way, he'll be doing concerts right round the world in the future. He told us this and much more at his hour-long press conference directly after his pre-opening show at Las Vegas International hotel.

His first words as he walked in, followed by his father Vernon Presley, were: "I'm really beat. That was the fourth time I did that show today." (He had three full dress rehearsals). But he didn't look beat and soon he was answering questions as fast as they were thrown at him... here are just some of them and his answers.

Why have you waited so long to perform live again?
ELVIS: We had to finish up the movie commitments we had before we started on this. I missed the live contact with an audience. It was getting harder and harder to sing to a camera all day long.

Will you do more live shows?
ELVIS: I sure hope so. I want to. I would like to play all over the world. Yes, Britain of course is included! I chose to play Las Vegas because it is a place people come to from all over.

Are you tired of your present type of movie?
ELVIS: Yes, I want to change the type of script I have been doing.

Do you feel it was a mistake to do so many movie soundtrack LPs?
ELVIS: I think so. When you do 10 songs in a movie they can't all be good songs. Anyway, I got tired of singing to turtles.

What kind of scripts would you like to do?
ELVIS: Something with meaning. I couldn't dig always playing the guy who'd get into a fight, beat the guy up and in the next shot sing to him.

Did you enjoy performing live again?
ELVIS: It was one of the most exciting nights of my life.

Did you feel nervous during your first show?
ELVIS: For the first three songs I was. Then I got loosened up.

Can you remember the first time you were in Las Vegas?
ELVIS: Yes. I was 19. Nobody knew who I was, "Where you from, boy?" they'd say.

How do you like the role of being a father?
ELVIS: I like it!

Do you plan to add to your family?
ELVIS: I'll let you know.

How does your wife feel about you being a sex symbol again?
ELVIS: We're planning to add to our family.

How do you manage to keep so young?
ELVIS: I don't know. One of these days it will all catch up with me and I'll probably fall apart.

Do you have a share in this hotel (the International)?
ELVIS: No, I have not.

Why have you led such a secluded life all these years?
ELVIS: It's not secluded. I'm just sneaky!

How much is your fee for a month's stay here?
(Enter manager Colonel Tom Parker, in white coat with "Elvis In Person" stamped all over it)
COL. PARKER: We are very happy with the deal, I'm glad he's here.

ANN MOSES: How do you like the idea of other groups, like Albert King, recording your songs?
ELVIS: I love it!

Where did you get the idea for your stage outfit?
ELVIS: From a karate outfit I had once.

How do you feel about the Hollywood social scene?
ELVIS: I just don't go for it. I have nothing against it, but I just don't enjoy it.

Are your wife and daughter here with you?
ELVIS: Priscilla's here but my daughter is back in Los Angeles with a nanny. She couldn't make it.

What do you do when you live at Graceland, your home in Memphis?
ELVIS: I like to ride my horses, swim a bit and chat with the tourists at the outer gate a while.

How did you choose the songs for your show?
ELVIS: Just sang my favourites, that's all.

Do you like leather jackets, like you wore on your TV special?
ELVIS: No, I hate leather jackets because they are just too hot to work in.

Do you dye your hair?
ELVIS: Sure, because I've always done it for the movies.

Why did you choose a girl back-up group?
ELVIS: Because they help to give me my feel, my soul.

Why do you choose to record message type songs like "In The Ghetto"? Are you trying to change your image?
ELVIS: No. "...Ghetto" was such a great song I just couldn't pass it up after I heard it.

Colonel Tom Parker ended the press conference by announcing that we all could be photographed with Elvis, but if it took a long time he'd have to charge us overtime!

"I GOT TIRED OF SINGING TO TURTLES"

Elvis on his movie soundtracks

Released: 1968 - 1970 | Record Label: RCA VICTOR

ELVIS/ FROM ELVIS IN MEMPHIS/ MEMPHIS TO VEGAS/VEGAS TO MEMPHIS /ON STAGE

Show 'em, son! Against the Colonel's better judgement, Elvis engineers a magnificent comeback: showing his mettle in an epochal TV Special. His engine running, even Vegas succumbs. | *By* **PETER WATTS**

ELVIS was a busted flush. The man who was once deemed so dangerously sexual his hips were banned from prime-time TV was reduced to singing an ode to a bull, the risible "Dominick" from the soundtrack to *Stay Away Joe*. It was the humiliating nadir of a career in freefall. Three films, all flops, were released in 1968 – *Speedway*, *Stay Away Joe* and *Live A Little, Love A Little*. *Speedway*'s soundtrack sold fewer than 100,000, while the others were deemed so insubstantial neither was granted an LP release. His film career was at an end, while the music had been so badly neglected that even when he reproduced the old magic – "A Little Less Conversation" or "Edge Of Reality" from *Live A Little, Love A Little* – nobody cared or even noticed.

NBC's Elvis special for Christmas 1968 was therefore not met with any great expectation, even if this was his first TV performance for eight years. But never underestimate a star, and never underestimate Colonel Tom Parker. Within weeks of *Singer Presents... Elvis* airing (Singer was the name of the sponsor, a sewing machine company), tectonic plates began to shift. Where *Speedway* stuck at 82, the soundtrack album, **Elvis**, went to No 8 – Presley's best for years. The Colonel seized the initiative and went to Las Vegas, booking Elvis into a lucrative hotel residency while Presley himself, newly engaged with music thanks to what everybody now calls the '68 Comeback Special, was talked into recording at a small studio in south Memphis. That resulted in his finest studio album of the decade, setting a triumphant scene for the third and final act of his career.

The TV special succeeded for three reasons: it harnessed Presley's natural charisma; it reminded viewers why Elvis had been so transgressively thrilling in the first place; and it made him relevant for a new era, where pop music had become the dominant form for expressing a philosophy of social consciousness. That was all contained on **Elvis** **(RCA, 1968)** ★★★★, the soundtrack album. It features Elvis joshing about his career, his voice, his looks, his films.... before unleashing the sort of vocal performance that undercut the self-deprecation at a stroke. You can see its legacy in dozens of back-to-basics comeback tours or chat-and-play TV specials, from *Let It Be* to *Get Back*. Even at his lowest ebb, Elvis did things first.

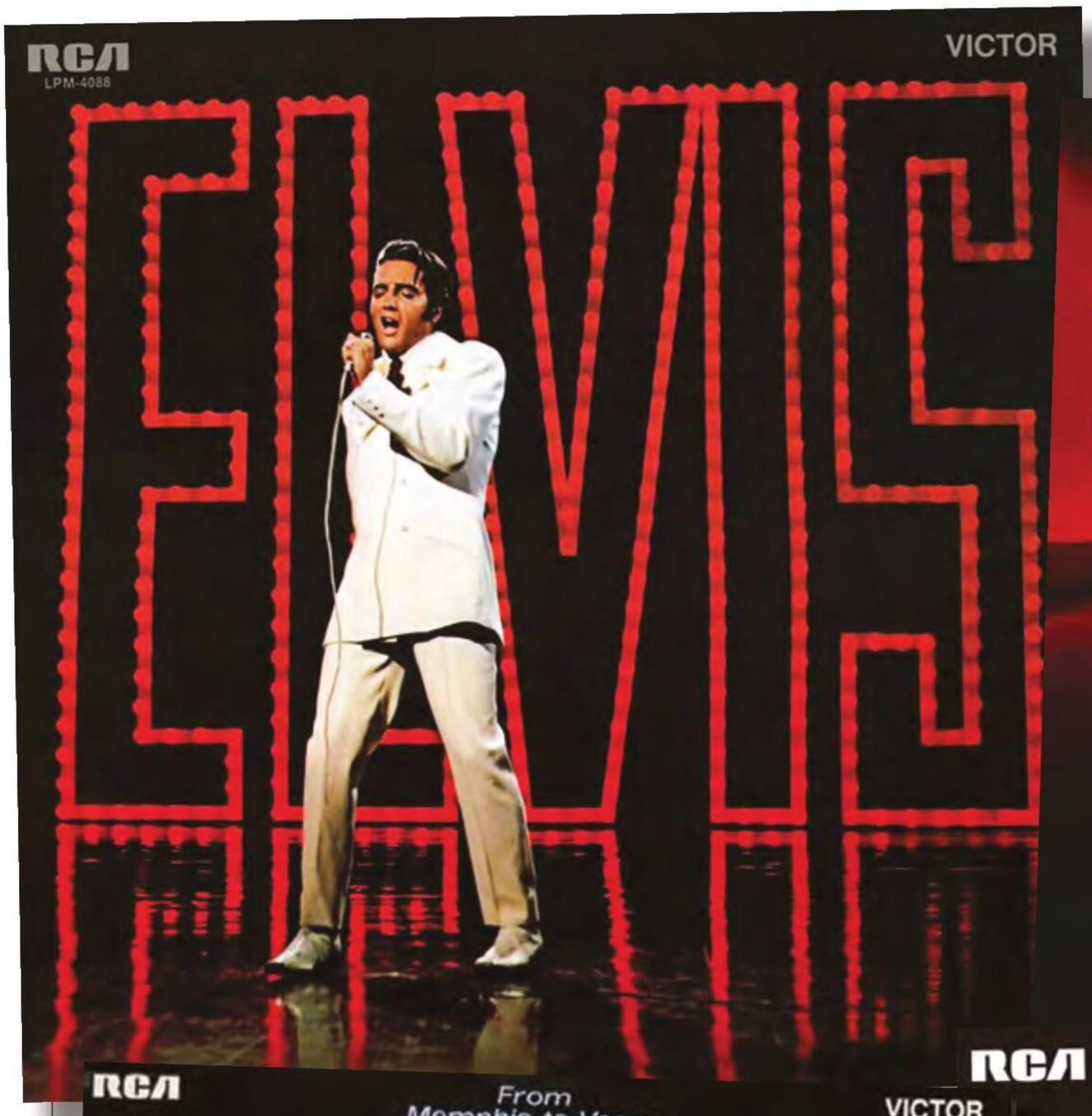
But the success of the TV show and the album Presley recorded in Memphis the following January owed much to two men who recognised the latent talent that many others, the Colonel included, had long neglected. At NBC, that was Steve Binder, who devised the formula very much against the wishes of Parker. Binder was a young director who cut his teeth on the *Hullabaloo* TV series and didn't care much for a dinosaur like Presley, but during rehearsals observed the way the star was at ease among the Memphis mafia. He thought to incorporate this into the show by staging an informal section where Presley would sit with his pals, play songs and reminisce – something improved immeasurably by a follow-up decision to employ Scotty Moore and DJ Fontana in this role. That allowed the leather-clad Presley to talk about those early days when Presley was more of a folk devil, reminding audiences that long before The Rolling Stones, there was Elvis, the original rock'n'roll rebel.

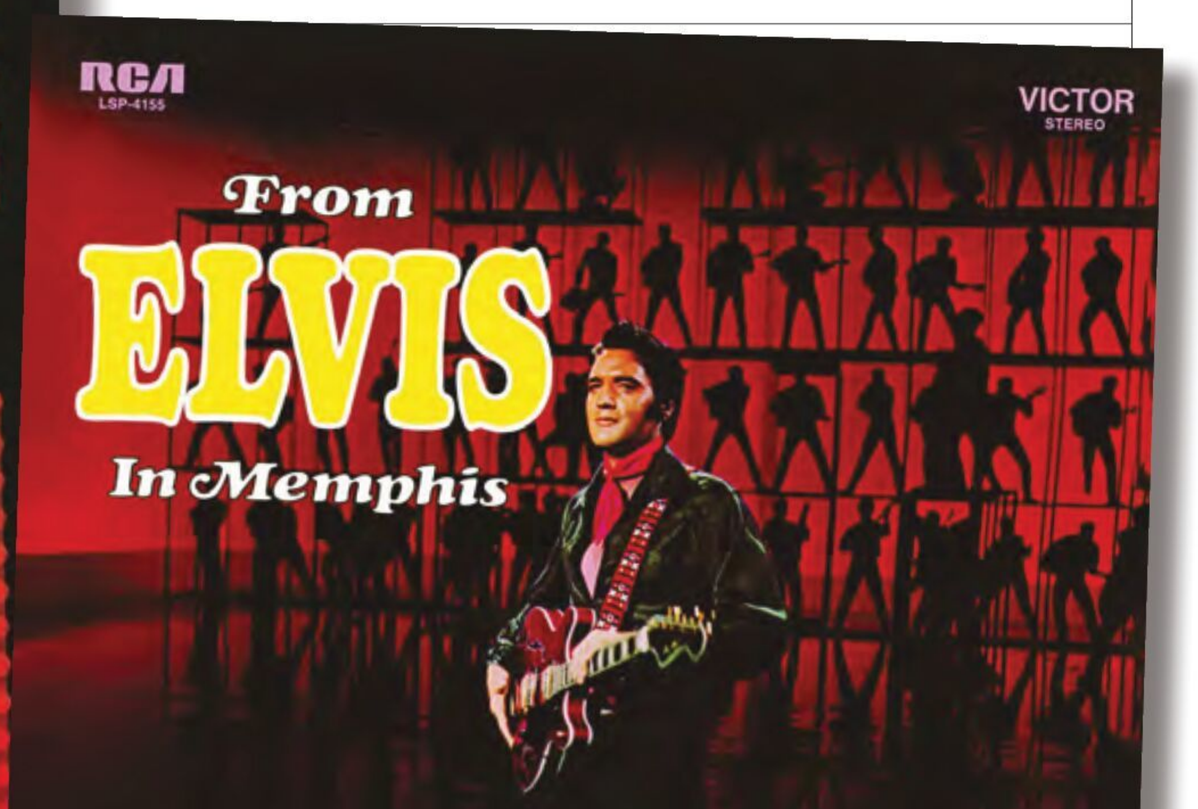
THE third masterstroke grew out of a conversation between Binder and Presley after Robert Kennedy's assassination during a meeting in June '68. Binder noted that Presley was genuinely moved by the murders of RFK and MLK and he

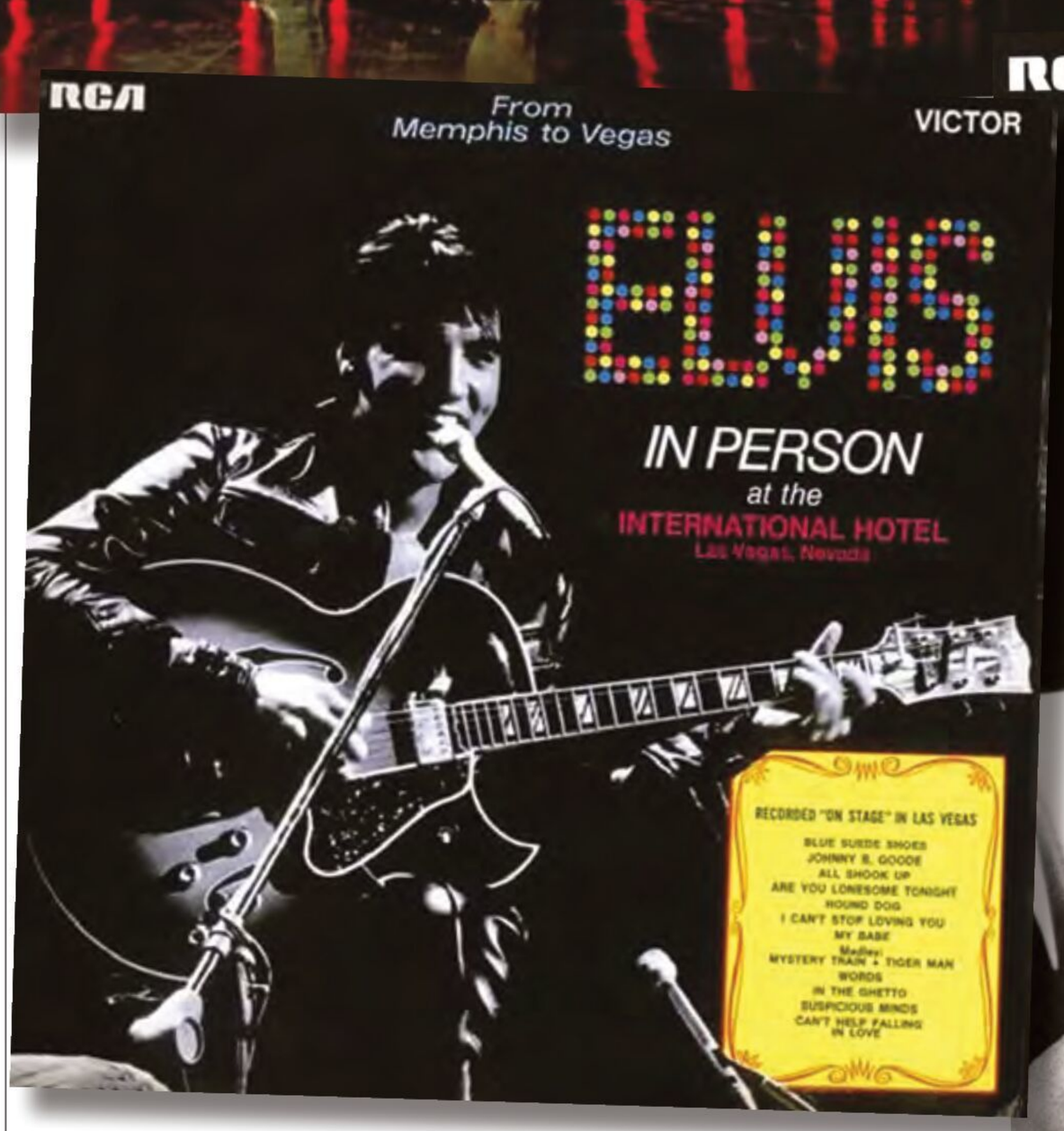
CRITICS' VERDICTS

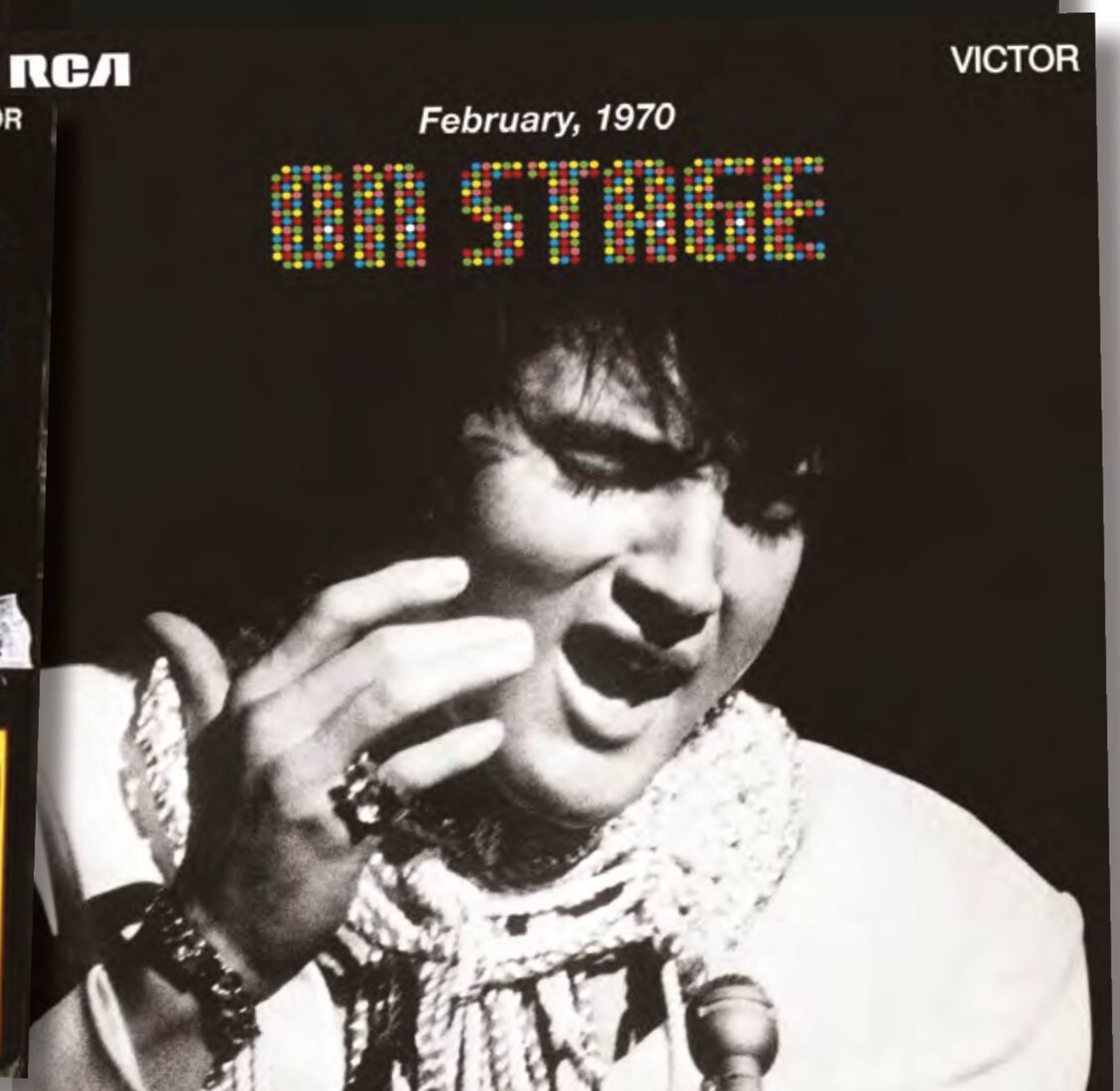
ELVIS

"Elvis Presley fans will go ga-ga over this latest LP of the hits, *Elvis* (from the Original Sound Track of his NBC-TV Special). In it he revives his wild, rocking days on Side One, and on the flip he does raving spiritual songs, a Christmas ditty, a fun rocker, a soft romantic song, a medley of film tunes... And on both sides he displays a happy sense of humour... this LP is pure pop history!"
ANDY GRAY, NME 12/04/1969









wondered if this insight could be captured in music. Colonel Tom wanted the finale to be a Christmas song but Binder commissioned "If I Can Dream", a song of hope in difficult times that Presley nailed in five takes, dimming the studio lights for the final effort so he could get right inside the sentiment of the song. Released ahead of the special, it went to No 12 selling 750,000 – his best since 1965. While "If I Can Dream" is somewhat hammy and overly sentimental, it showed a willingness to tackle challenging material that would shortly lead to one of Presley's great recordings.

Four hours were taped over two sessions – a sit-down segment with Presley, Moore, Fontana plus Alan Fortas and Charlie Hodge, and a stand-up performance – which was whittled down to 50 minutes for broadcast on December 3. The TV audience was huge and reviews generally positive, although *Variety* complained "he still can't sing". Other more salient observers noted that Presley was more natural and committed than he'd been for years. The musical highlights were almost all present on *Elvis* from the opening salvo of "Trouble"/"Guitar Man" – the latter inspired by Quincy Jones's theme for *In Cold Blood*. There are medleys of rock'n'roll classics – a splendid snatch of "Heartbreak Hotel", a raucous "Hound Dog" – some gospel, with a particularly fine "Up Above My Head", a cracking take on "One Night" and solid balladry like "Memories".

Elvis is at his raunchy best on "Nothingville" and explores his deepest feelings on "If I Can Dream". Colonel Tom even got his Christmas number, a rather desultory "Blue Christmas". There's no room on the original album for "Trying To Get To You", one of the show's best moments, although that did appear on the expanded 1991 reissue – while just about everything can

★★★

★★★

The '68 Comeback Special, Burbank, CA, June 27, 1968

That is offset by the austere second record, aka *Back In Memphis*, a first-rate blue-eyed soul record. Highlights include a sensational "Stranger In My Own Hometown", "You'll Think Of Me" and "Without Love". As a record, it holds together exceptionally well as many of the songs cover themes of heartbreak and loss – it's almost like Presley's version of *In The Wee Small Hours*. He'd come a long way from "Dominick", despite what trauma that poor bull endured.

From *Memphis To Vegas/From Vegas To Memphis* was later split into two separate albums. These days, you can get the *Back In Memphis* recordings as a second CD on the Legacy Edition of *From Elvis In Memphis* as well as on the 2CD anthology, *Suspicious Minds*, which rounds up the non-album singles and other songs from these sessions. Similarly, *Elvis In Person* can be found as a second disc with the Legacy Edition of live album **On Stage** (RCA, 1970) ★★★★. This featured Presley performing Vegas covers of "Yesterday", "Polk Salad Annie", "See See Rider", "Sweet Carolina" and "Proud Mary" among others. It included his bravura take on "The Wonder Of You", which would be Presley's last UK No 1 until after his death. Great singles would come in between, but ultimately the comeback would peter out as the Colonel regained control and Presley became addicted to the Vegas lifestyle. But that burst of creativity left behind music that would endure, adding a depth to the Presley discography that many had assumed lay far beyond his reach.

TRACKMARKS | ELVIS | FROM ELVIS IN MEMPHIS | MEMPHIS TO VEGAS/VEGAS TO MEMPHIS | ON STAGE

ELVIS ★★★★
Label: RCA Victor
Released: December 1968
Produced by: Bones Howe, Steve Binder
Recorded at: Western Recorders, Los Angeles
Highest chart position: UK 2; US 8

FROM ELVIS IN MEMPHIS ★★★★★
Label: RCA Victor
Released: June 17, 1969
Produced by: Chips Moman
Recorded at: American Sound, Memphis
Highest chart position: UK 1; US 13

FROM MEMPHIS TO VEGAS/FROM VEGAS TO MEMPHIS ★★★★
Label: RCA Victor,
Released: October 14, 1969
Produced by: Chips Moman, Felton Jarvis
Recorded at: American Sound, Memphis; International Hotel, Las Vegas
Highest chart position: UK 3; US 12

ON STAGE ★★★★
Label: RCA Victor
Released: June 1970
Produced by: Felton Jarvis
Recorded at: International Hotel, Las Vegas
Highest chart position: UK 2; US 13

MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

Released: 1970 - 1972

Record Label: RCA VICTOR

THAT'S THE WAY IT IS /ELVIS COUNTRY /LOVE LETTERS FROM ELVIS /ELVIS NOW

A bridge between Nashville and Las Vegas. Mixing magical live cuts and studio sessions, a rejuvenated Elvis dives deep into his roots.

BY **ANDREW MUELLER**

ELVIS'S Vegas years have become synonymous with decadence, and not just his own – the period is invoked when any public figure appears to be lapsing into self-indulgence, self-destruction and/or complacent cashing-in. Where Vegas Presley is concerned, these charges are obviously not entirely lacking in merit, but to dismiss all of his 1970s output is to dismiss some of his most compelling work.

That's The Way It Is (RCA VICTOR, 1970) ★★★★ serves in Presley's journey as a bridge laid between Nashville and Las Vegas. Of its 12 tracks, eight were recorded in Nashville at RCA Studio B, four live in concert at The International Hotel in Vegas – later the Hilton, now the Westgate – where Presley was by now living in the 30th-floor penthouse while he undertook residencies in the venue's cavernous theatre, in brackets of four weeks at a time, two shows a night. The LP also serves as a soundtrack and/or accompaniment to Denis Sanders' *Elvis: That's The Way It Is*, which chronicled the establishment of the Presley circus in Vegas.

That's The Way It Is therefore catches Elvis at the transition from high-cheekboned, hip-shaking rock'n'roller to generously jowled cabaret entertainer. While there is certainly cause for regret about where that path ended, anyone who secured a ticket for 1970 Elvis was getting something of the best of both worlds.

He'd just turned 35. The recently introduced trademark jumpsuit was still doing more accentuating of the contents than constraining them. His voice was better than ever, his adolescent yelp descended to a rich baritone drawl. The band, conducted by James Burton with a pink paisley Fender Telecaster, were astounding. The opener, a live version of the Mann/Weil song "I Just Can't Help Believing" is a sumptuous potted epic of heartbreak and hubris, like hearing one of Billy Sherrill's lavish arrangements for George Jones conjured into being in real time.

CRITICS' VERDICTS

THAT'S THE WAY IT IS

"Whether you applaud this album depends on how you like your Elvis, partially diluted by a dash of showbiz, or mumbling along with a guitar for company. The accent here is on a 'Las Vegas'-type production, with Elvis accompanied by strings, horns, and the Imperials or the Sweet Inspirations, varying from track to track. Vocally, he's in triumphant form..."

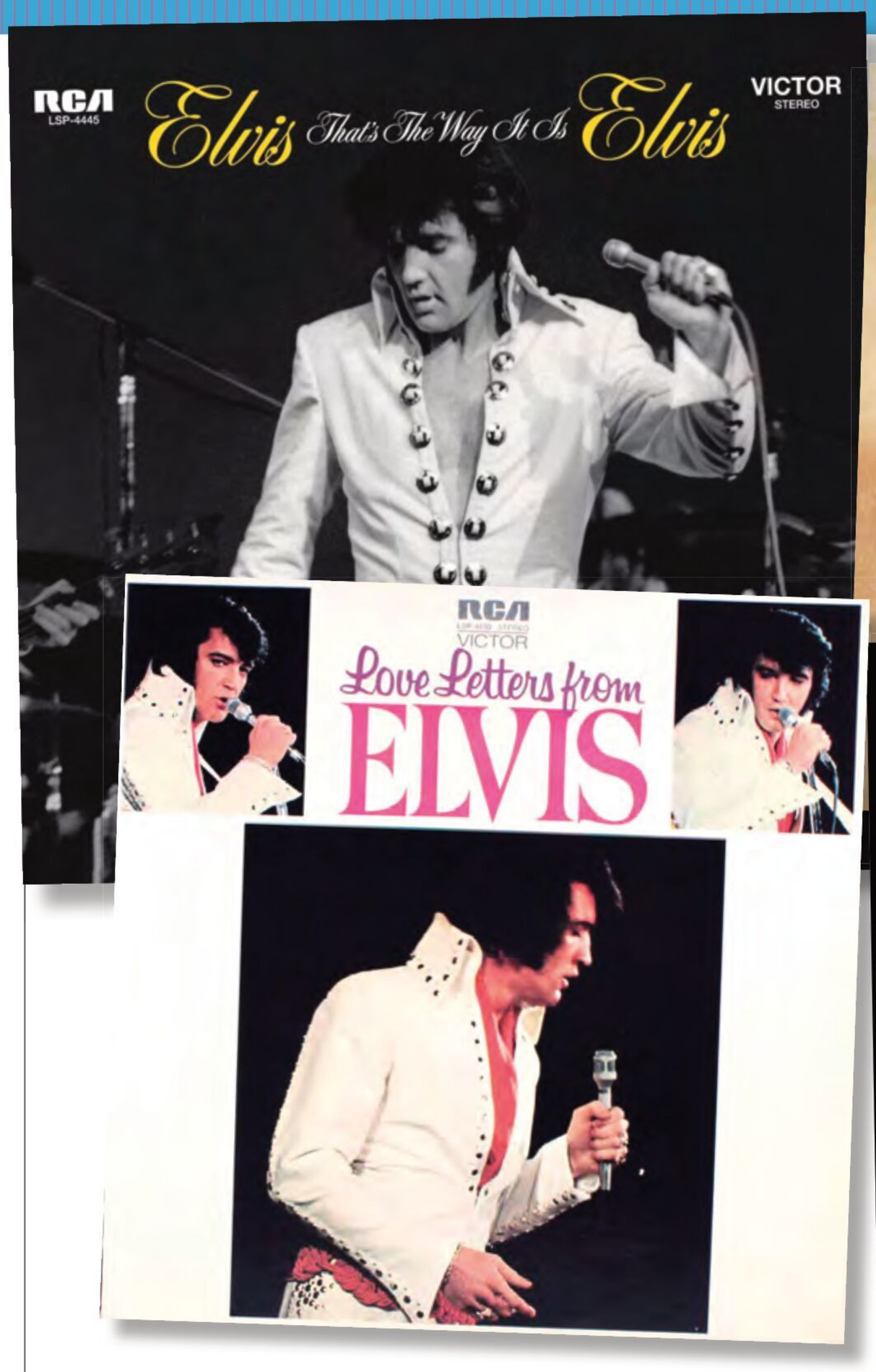
RAY COLEMAN, MELODY MAKER, 27/03/1971

The studio cuts on *That's The Way It Is* lack something of the fizz and crackle of the live recordings – Presley, at this point, still sounded more like he was feeding on performance rather than being consumed by it – but nevertheless rank high among his best. When he takes on the standards – Simon & Garfunkel's "Bridge Over Troubled Water", Dusty Springfield's "You Don't Have To Say You Love Me" – they sound suddenly like Elvis songs. When he sings the hitherto unknown tracks – especially the Fletcher/Flett lament "Just Pretend", which he deftly lands just this side of hilariously overwrought – they're instantly canonical.

The June 1970 sessions which yielded the studio component of the album were frantic, and productive. Five days of overnight shifts, 6:00pm until sun-up, yielded 35 tracks – enough of which had a country tendency to justify an entire country album. It seems weird that it took so long for Presley to fully embrace country. It was music he'd grown up with – he'd idolised the Louvin Brothers, Alabama siblings who harmonised like wolves howling in tune, who he'd opened for in the mid-1950s. And, as he abundantly demonstrated on **Elvis Country** (RCA VICTOR, 1971) ★★★★, he could sing the very heck out of it.

Possibly due to concerns about Presley being characterised as some opportunist claim-jumper pulling on roots to which he was dubiously entitled, the cover of *Elvis Country* rather oversold Presley's good-ol' boy credentials: a sepia-toned portrait of the singer as a Tupelo toddler, inlaid with a black and white family portrait including his parents, Vernon and Gladys.

Whoever was responsible needn't have worried. What emerged was – and remains – a plausible contender for the title of Presley's finest studio album, its only real flaw a somewhat ham-handed attempt to endow it with thematic coherence by linking the tracks with snippets of the standard "I Was Born About 10,000 Years Ago", which rapidly grows to feel as if business is being interrupted by commercial breaks.



IT would be easy to over-analyse the title beyond it being a prosaic statement of what listeners should expect. However, if it was in any sense an attempt to annex the genre, the contents justified it. *Elvis Country* was both a tour and tour de force of the genre, taking in western swing (Bob Wills' "Faded Love", previously a hit for Patsy Cline), honky-tonk balladry (Willie Nelson's "Funny How Time Slips Away"), tears-in-beer countrypolitan (Dallas Frazier's "There Goes My Everything"), even primordial country rock (a fabulously feral slap at Jerry Lee Lewis's "Whole Lotta Shakin' Goin' On"). Best of all is a song by Nora Fowler and Shirl Milete – "It's Your Baby, You Rock It", a delectably deadpan wave-off of a heartbroken friend of whose self-pitying whining the narrator has grown tired. Throughout, Presley is singing at his absolute peak, sauntering the spectrum from abject vulnerability to ironclad confidence as the material demands. Not everything Presley touched during these sessions turned to absolutely 24-carat gold, however, as would eventually be demonstrated by **Love Letters From Elvis** **(RCA, 1971)** ★★★, which gathered up the studio floor sweepings from Nashville. It has moments, however – the two Shirl Milete cuts, "Life" and "When I'm Over You", deserve to see daylight, as does a glorious tear-up of the Ben Weisman/Buddy Kaye/Dolores Fuller rockabilly swinger "Cindy Cindy", James Burton trading twanging licks with a colossal brass section.

Two more cuts from the 1970 Nashville sessions made it onto **Elvis Now** **(RCA, 1972)** ★★★ – the full version of "I Was Born About 10,000 Years Ago", which owners of *Elvis Country* could surely have had little wish to hear again, and "Sylvia", by Les Reed and Geoff Stephens, a thing of Scott Walker-ish melodramatic grandeur. *Elvis Now* marks the point at which it would have been reasonable for fans to feel the first stirrings of yearning for Elvis back then. He sings all over The Beatles' "Hey Jude" like he's trying to keep up with an unfamiliar tune on a karaoke machine, and Ewan MacColl's "The First Time Ever I Saw Your Face" like it's the first time ever he heard this song.

Elvis Now is far from a total dud – the lovely, careworn version of Kris Kristofferson's "Help Me Make It Through The Night" pretty much excuses the album's weaknesses alone. Not least because of the melancholy gravitas conferred by all that happened subsequently upon this plea for rescue from loneliness.

★★★

"He would soar up there"

After the success of the *…Memphis* album, the next Presley recordings take an unexpected, exuberant turn. Returning to Nashville, Elvis records a suite of pop classics – but then breaks out into country material. "It was almost like he was doing a live show for you," guitarist JAMES BURTON tells NICK HASTED. "He'd be putting on a show for the musicians."

Still from *That's The Way It Is*: rehearsing at MGM studios, 1970

RB/REDFERNS

IT'S a sleepy Sunday afternoon on the outskirts of Bonn. Last night, veterans of Elvis Presley's TCB Band packed out the city's Stadthalle as part of a European tour to celebrate what would have been the King's 78th birthday. Today, a couple of middle-aged men with pompadours from the local Elvis Presley fan club drift around the foyer of a hotel close to the venue. Meanwhile, just a few feet away from them, sitting at the rear of the hotel's restaurant, two members of the TCB Band are reminiscing about a forgotten peak in Presley's career. James Burton was Presley's guitarist and right-hand man from 1969 until the singer's death in 1977. Sporting a thin moustache and a black Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame cap and jacket, he trades stories with bassist Norbert Putnam, a founding member of Alabama's iconic Muscle Shoals rhythm section. They met in Nashville, almost 44 years ago. A copy of the first record they played on together, *Elvis Country*, lies on a table between them – a photograph of the future King Of Rock'n'Roll, aged two, staring out at them from the front cover.

"I was totally stiff with fright before that first session," laughs Putnam. "I don't know why, because I'd already had a very successful 10 years in the studio. But something told me, this is bigger than anything that you've ever been a part of. I remember standing in the bathroom, just before I went out there, and I'd look in the mirror and say, 'Dear God, guide my fingers. Don't allow me to be the one to screw this up.'"

When Elvis Presley entered the studio in June 1970, he did so as a man enjoying an unexpected third-act peak. The NBC TV special – the '68 Comeback – his record-breaking live return in Las Vegas, and a batch of sessions at Memphis' American Sound Studio resulting in the acclaimed *From Elvis In Memphis* album had successfully reinvigorated his career after a decade of artistic and commercial decline. These are remembered now as the final flare of Presley's majesty, but the sessions that produced 1970's *That's The Way It Is* and *Elvis Country* the following year tell a different story: of a comeback with some distance left to run. As the surviving musicians who gathered in Nashville's RCA Studio B now testify, they found Presley energised, determined, ready to pull off whatever he set his mind to. "He was fearless," confirms Putnam. "Elvis didn't have any borders."

WHILE *That's The Way It Is* is a wonderful collection, in which Elvis makes warm and stately tilts at pop anthems accompanied by an intuitive and top-flight band, *Elvis Country* is a return to roots. Released in 1971 at the height of country rock, the material – bluegrass, rockabilly, honky tonk, covers of songs by his heroes Eddy Arnold and Ernest Tubb – was deeply personal to Elvis.

"Many of them were hits when he was just a kid," acknowledges the archivist who helps compile Sony Legacy's Elvis releases, Ernst Mikael Jorgensen. But astonishingly, it's an album that seems to have been created almost by accident, in the middle of recording something else altogether.

Prior to the sessions, Presley had made a successful trip to the American Sound Studios in Memphis, which had yielded "Suspicious Minds" and the aforementioned *From Elvis In Memphis*, produced by Chip Moman. Moman encouraged Presley to work with material outside his normal range – including "In The Ghetto". "They'd made a great LP in Memphis, and they should have cut there again," says Elvis' pianist David Briggs, speaking from his Nashville home. "But I don't think they could get along with Chips Moman. It was politics and business."

> "HE WAS FEARLESS... ELVIS DIDN'T HAVE BORDERS"
> *Norbert Putnam*

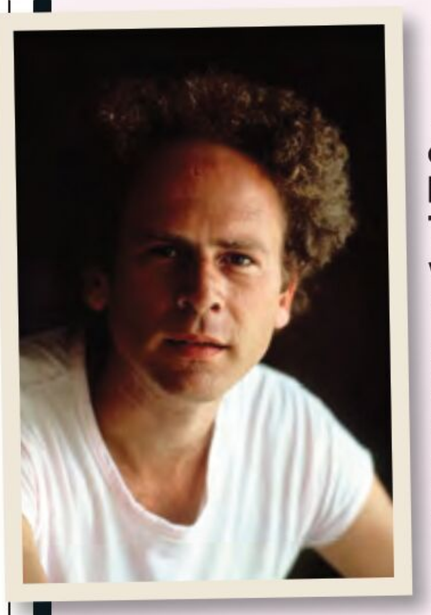
Elvis returned to Nashville, to RCA Studio B – where he'd recorded 18 sessions since 1958 – and his regular producer, Felton Jarvis, very different from the demanding Moman. "Felton wasn't a musical guy," says Putnam. "Felton was a pretty good judge of material that normal people would buy, and he was fun. Felton never got in the way."

"Felton wanted to get it back up here where he could control it," adds Briggs. The success of *From Elvis In Memphis* had been noted, though, as Putnam recalls: "Felton said, 'I want you on the next batch of Elvis sessions, 'cos it's got to be more like the American guys, and you guys are Muscle Shoals.'"

Elvis Presley walked into RCA Studio B at 8pm on June 4 to be greeted by some familiar faces

"WAIT 'TIL GARFUNKEL HEARS THIS!"

More Elvis takes from the Nashville sessions, including a great version of "Bridge Over Troubled Water"...



ELVIS recorded 38 master-takes during the June and September 1970 Nashville sessions. They didn't go to waste. Two other Elvis albums, released either side of *Elvis Country*, drew on material recorded during these sessions. *That's The Way It Is* released on November 11, 1970 six weeks prior to *Elvis Country*. Nominally a soundtrack to Denis Sanders' film of the August residency in Las Vegas, it included eight studio tracks from the RCA Studio B sessions, including a barnstorming version of Simon & Garfunkel's "Bridge Over Troubled Water". "I thought, 'My God, he's tearing this song alive'," says Norbert Putnam. "He even said something like, 'Wait till Garfunkel hears this!'"

Both *That's The Way It Is* and *Elvis Country* sold half a million copies in America, while the latter gave Presley his highest-charting studio album of the decade – No 12. Less auspiciously, *Love Letters From Elvis*, released on June 16, 1971, only limped to No 33 in the charts. "I just wanted to try 'Love Letters' again," sighs David Briggs, who also played on the version of the song Presley first recorded in 1966. "We didn't have any idea they would put it out. But they named an album after it." Other tracks from the sessions also appeared on February 1972's *Elvis Now*. "It was always a problem with Elvis albums that too much shit was recorded," archivist Ernst Mikael Jorgensen concludes. Elvis never recorded in Nashville Studio B again.

SUNSET BOULEVARD/CORBIS VIA GETTY IMAGES; MPI/GETTY IMAGES

PHOTO 12/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO; ART ZELIN/GETTY IMAGES; GAB ARCHIVE/REDFERNS

TIMELINE ELVIS COUNTRY

1970

January–February
Elvis starts second four-week run at the International. The new show is strikingly different, featuring tunes like Neil Diamond's "Sweet Caroline" and Creedence Clearwater Revival's "Proud Mary".

June
Elvis returns to RCA Studio B in Nashville to work with long-time producer Felton Jarvis. The session includes "I Washed My Hands In Muddy Water" and Willie Nelson's "Funny How Time Slips Away".

August
Elvis begins a new residency at the International. Cary Grant (left) comes backstage to tell Elvis he's the "greatest entertainer since Jolson". Four of the nights are filmed for what will become *Elvis: That's The Way It Is*. However, boredom and the pressure of two shows a night lead him back to prescription drugs.

14 Patricia Ann Parker launches a paternity suit claiming Elvis got her pregnant during his last Vegas engagement. Elvis's marriage in crisis as rumours abound of a string of affairs.

26 Threats are made to kidnap Elvis during the Saturday 29 show.

Getting shirty: on the set of *Elvis: That's The Way It Is*, 1970

Massive security detail springs into action. Elvis performs with a pistol in each boot. Nothing happens.

September

Elvis begins seven-date US tour in Phoenix. The Memphis Mafia and his favoured physician, Dr Nichopoulos, accompany him on the road. After the tour, he flies to Nashville for another brief recording session.

October

11 He is officially sworn in as a Shelby County Sheriff's Deputy.

November

An eight-date tour. Promoter Jerry Weintraub demands a $1million fee.

December

In a three-night splurge at Kerr's Sporting Goods in LA, he spends $20,000 on guns as Christmas gifts.

21 Elvis meets President Nixon at the White House and presents him with a custom Colt.45. He promises to help in the war on drugs and is promised an agent's badge from the Bureau Of Narcotics And Dangerous Drugs. Despite unprecedented popularity and a satellite concert broadcast reaching an audience of over a billion, drugs, divorce and the demands of near-constant touring hasten Elvis's physical and mental decline. The guitar man is in trouble.

Shake, rattle'n'roll: meeting US President Richard Nixon in 1970

Elvis in *That's The Way It Is*: 1970

– James Burton, who'd made his live debut with Elvis the previous year, David Briggs, harmonica player/organist Charlie McCoy and guitarist Chip Young. There were some new ones, too: the rhythm section of Putnam and drummer Jerry Carrigan – both Muscle Shoals alumni. In effect, this was a new band waiting for him.

"I remember seeing him for the first time," says Putnam. "He comes bursting into the studio, and he's wearing a long black cape, and he's carrying a walking stick with a lion's head with ruby eyes. And he walked in like Prince Leopold, and took his cape off and he tossed it. He stood up and said, 'I was wondering if any of you guys would like to help me make a few phonograph records?' Then he burst out laughing, and he's telling four or five stories, making us all laugh. He reminded me of the kids I knew in high school. He never wore that cape again. Maybe he was dressing up for the new boys. In 1970, he was in great physical condition, he was still working out with his karate every day. I looked at him when he came in, and thought, 'He's the most beautiful man I've ever seen.'"

> "WHEN HE CAME IN, I THOUGHT 'HE'S THE MOST BEAUTIFUL MAN I'VE EVER SEEN'"
> *Norbert Putnam*

Working with Elvis was a unique experience for the musicians. "Elvis was on a different planet," Putnam explains. "In the control room would be all the Memphis Mafia and the publishing guys. And no matter how mediocre the first take was, at the end of it, they would leap into the air. They're saying, 'Gas, King! You're the King! Touchdown!' And we're all going, 'Boy, we could make this a lot better...' But they all worked for him. Every man had a chore assigned. I remember one of them brought in a Halliburton briefcase. And inside was an arsenal of weapons. So he was obviously the security guy."

Putnam also remembers some of Elvis's more unusual studio practices. "Studio B was a very traditional, open room. Screens were available, but most nights Presley sang into this mic with a long cable, and he'd come out and stand in front of us, and he'd be dancing. It was very difficult for the engineer. He wasn't interested in recording technique, whatsoever."

"It was almost like he was doing a live show for you," says Burton. "He'd be putting on a show for the musicians."

According to Peter Guralnick's Elvis biography, *Careless Love*, a rack of clothes was available for costume changes. "He wasn't changing clothes to impress you," Briggs says. "He was sweating and felt dirty. He was working hard."

THERE was little evidence of how good that work would be when the sessions began. Elvis's publishers Freddy Bienstock and Lamar Fike started off by pitching the sort of tame material he'd been singing before Memphis. "There's every reason to believe the country album wasn't planned," explains Ernst Mikael Jorgensen, who has heard every tape from the sessions. "I think Felton thought he was going to go in there to record an album of pop songs. They started with two British power ballads – 'I've Lost You' and 'Twenty Days And Twenty Nights'. But then Elvis jumps into 'I Was Born About Ten Thousand Years Ago', in one take."

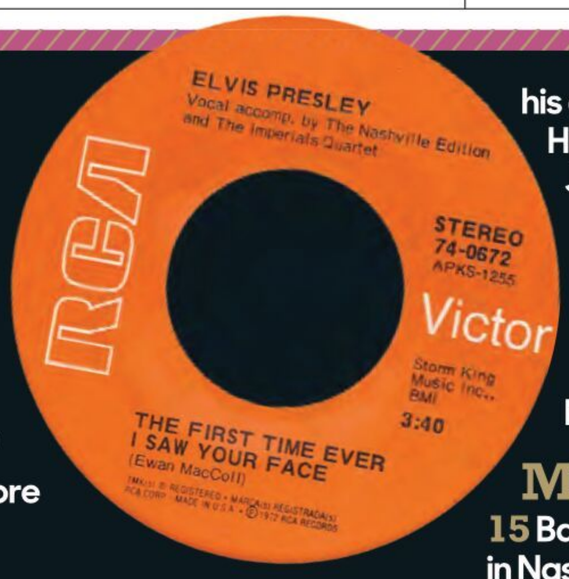
Originally a gospel tune, the boisterous version of "I Was Born..." would weave in and out of *Elvis Country*, an impromptu theme threading the

TIMELINE ELVIS COUNTRY

1971

January
16 Elvis is at the Memphis Municipal Auditorium to receive a prize as one of the year's Ten Outstanding Young Men Of The Nation, awarded by the Junior Chamber Of Commerce to high achievers under 40. UN ambassador George Bush gives keynote address.
26 He starts another month-long run at the International in Vegas.

March
15 Recording session begins for gospel album *He Touched Me*. Versions of "The First Time Ever I Saw Your Face" and "Amazing Grace" are put down before Elvis is admitted to Memphis Hospital with serious glaucoma,



thought to be caused by dye from his eyebrows. His mistress Joyce Bova nurses him further at home, but the condition will dog him until his death.

May
15 Back in the studio in Nashville to record Christmas album *Elvis Sings The Wonderful World Of Christmas*.

June
10 Highway 51 South, part of which runs past Graceland, is renamed Elvis Presley Boulevard (right).

July
A fortnight run at the Sahara Hotel, Lake Tahoe, Nevada is followed by a month at the Vegas

ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

record together. "After Elvis has finished more demanding, big ballads, including 11 takes of 'The Sound Of Your Cry', it's past midnight," Jorgensen continues. "And they start to play 'Faded Love' in a country version, and then they jump into 'A Hundred Years From Now' and 'Little Cabin On The Hill' – bluegrass songs like he did at Sun, not serious, with Elvis on his own acoustic guitar, very spirited. And Felton panics. This is developing in a way that he never anticipated, and fast, so at the end of the reel he has to turn the tape over and record on the back, there's no time to get a new one. They did nine songs that first night."

For a typical session, Burton remembers, "Elvis would only wanna sing a song three, four times at most. And after that, he'd move onto something else. He was the greatest at taking the song and redoing it, putting his thing to it, his arrangement. His voice was so powerful, and we had all the freedom in the world to play what we wanted to play. I loved it when Norbert would break out the stand-up bass..."

"Elvis would let you go," continues Putnam. "He never said, 'I'd like you to play like this.' He would take the song and start getting in the mood to do it, then the light would come on and we'd play to that emotion. And he loved it, didn't he? I'd say, 'King' or sometimes we called him El. 'El, what do you think of the bass part?'"

"I had all the freedom I needed," adds Burton. "We'd rehearse a song, and after one time, we knew who was going to play the intro, who was going to play the turn-around and we all picked out the little frills for each one of us..."

Over the next two nights, there was little sign this interlude was significant. But on June 7, the floodgates opened and six country songs poured out of Elvis. Eddy Arnold's 1954 hit "I Really Don't Want To Know", another version of Bob Wills' "Faded Love", Ernest Tubb's "Tomorrow Never Comes", Ray Price's "Make The World Go Away", Willie Nelson's "Funny How Time Slips Away" and a riotous take on Charlie Rich's 1965 hit, "I Washed My Hands In Muddy Water". "He puts this blues phrasing on 'I Really Don't Want to Know' that makes it wonderful," Jorgensen says, "and then the whole spirit is created."

Presley had effectively hijacked his own session, using it to pay tribute to many of his favourite songs and formative musical idols. Eddy Arnold – pioneer of the 'Nashville sound' – was "definitely a hero", Jorgensen explains, and points out that Arnold was there in the photo commemorating Elvis' signing to RCA. Grand Ole Opry patriarch Ernest Tubb was, Jorgensen says, a "mighty man" to Elvis: "'Tomorrow Never Comes' is a difficult song for Elvis to sing, you can hear him struggling all the way through the takes. But it's an Ernest Tubb song. And Elvis says, 'If I can't sing it all the way through, I'm not going to do it.'" Meanwhile, Texan swing king Bob Wills personally also encouraged the young Elvis in 1954. Elsewhere, Charlie Rich, Presley's near-contemporary at Sun, and Willie Nelson complete the night's cross-section of country songs. "There's no talking, mostly first takes, one right after another," reveals Jorgensen. "I wouldn't say the excitement is building that night. What happens is, it flows so naturally. It's more like playing music than recording it."

"There was some plan," nods Putnam. "I think he and Felton had considered doing a country LP. But it was a total surprise to us." At the session, Elvis would try to get the songs in one take, and the band would find ways of stalling him while Putnam or Briggs scrawled down arrangements in pencil. The songs, at least, they knew well: "A lot of stuff we'd played on the original sessions," laughs Briggs.

"I thought he should have done it a long time before that," says Charlie McCoy. "It's so natural for him. OK, he grew up doing R&B, but his roots are as country as anything else."

"But," Burton emphasises, "we didn't treat 'em like country."

"We didn't go for the normal country arrangement," Putnam confirms. "We played them in the way that came naturally. Black music had influenced me heavier than anything, after I became a musician. And I needed to make the bassline more interesting than a country bassline. Jerry Carrigan and I had come up from Muscle Shoals, and you'll hear that R&B influence in songs like 'Make The World Go Away' – a little more soul on the bass and drums."

> "ELVIS WOULD ONLY WANNA SING A SONG THREE, FOUR TIMES AT MOST"
> *James Burton*

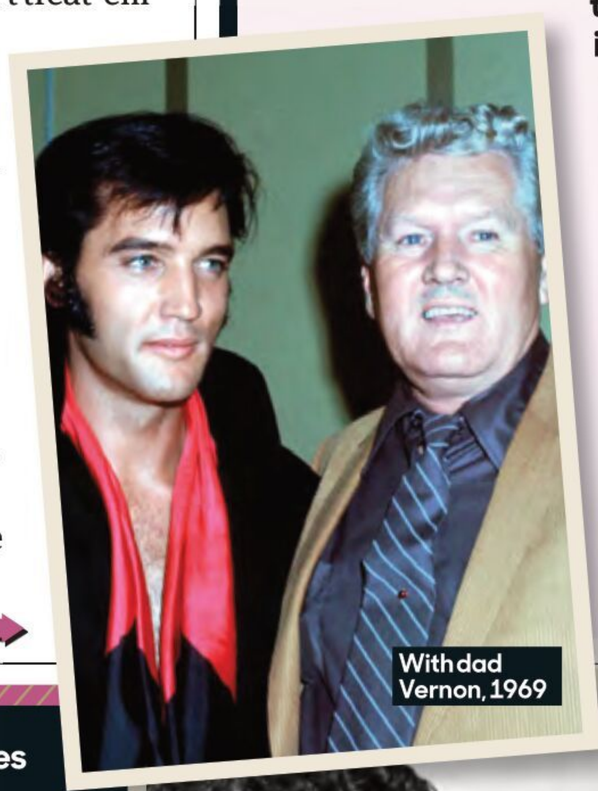
HAT'S ALL RIGHT, MAMA

"That is one of the most amazing photographs, isn't it?" says Norbert Putnam. "The looks are already formed, and the curl..."

***ELVIS COUNTRY*'s rare thematic daring even extended to its sleeve. The art department at Presley's label, RCA, took the unusual decision to use as the central image on the front cover a then-virtually unseen photo of Elvis, aged two, in a hat and dungarees.**

The picture – coloured in by the RCA art boys – is in fact a detail taken from another black and white photo, which is inset in the sleeve's corner, showing Elvis with his parents, Vernon and Gladys. It's an astonishing treatment of Elvis's image – especially when compared to the LPs that followed. The sleeves for 24 of the 28 subsequent albums released in the last six years of his life were generic live shots, Elvis pictured with a mic in hand, demonstrating that never again was such care put into creating his sleeve art.

MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES; HULTON ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES; BOB PARDUE/SOUTH CENTRAL/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO


With dad Vernon, 1969

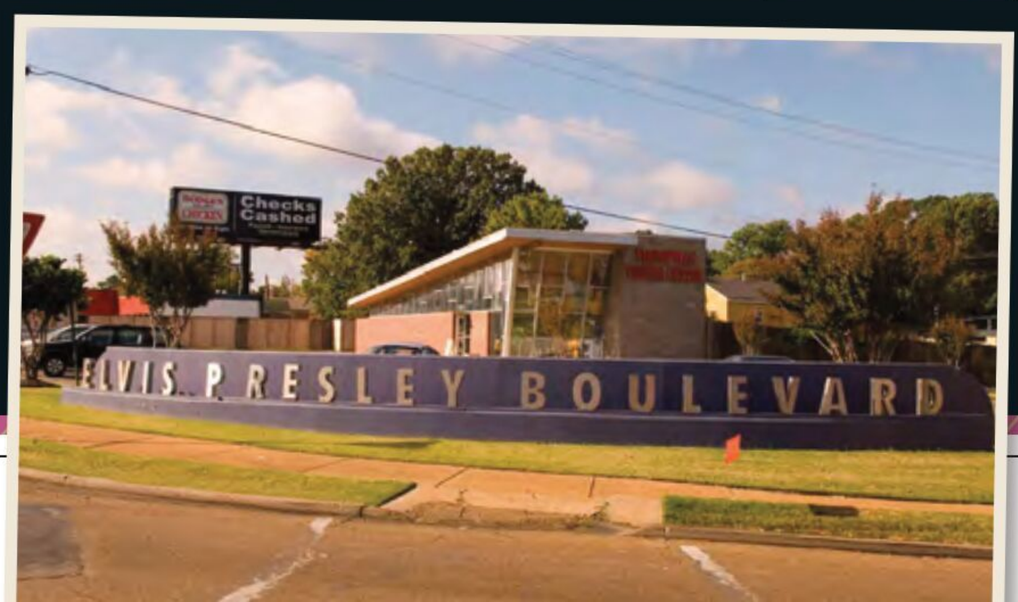
International. Elvis's marriage is in tatters. Priscilla is having an affair with karate instructor Mike Stone, while Joyce Bova has an abortion. Colonel Parker starts to gamble massive amounts of money in Las Vegas casinos.

November

5 Another 12-date US tour opens in Minneapolis. Regular backing band The Imperials are junked and JD Sumner & The Stamps hired. Elvis's jewellery and costumes become increasingly ostentatious.

December

Priscilla leaves Elvis, taking daughter Lisa Marie with her. Elvis announces the break-up, though divorce proceedings will not begin until the following summer.



Watch out: with wife Priscilla and pal Tom Jones in Las Vegas, July 1971

Red rooster: Elvis in *That's The Way It Is*, 1970

"IT WAS A NATURAL, EXCITING THING, PLAYING BEHIND THAT VOICE"

James Burton

Burton: "When I got out the dobro, for 'Funny How Time Slips Away', Elvis said, 'Come on, baby. Come on...' You know like on 'Make The World Go Away', Elvis' vocal on that [*croons delicately*] and then the dobro thing really fit that song, and it was different to what you were expecting. And 'I Washed My Hands In Muddy Water', I had a little mud on my strings to get that scratchy sound. Ooh, and 'Faded Love', that was raunchy. Yeah, man. It's one of my favourite albums ever."

The last country song they recorded on the June 7 sessions, "I Washed My Hands In Muddy Water", shows the kind of music they were creating here. A tale of a Tennessee outlaw who can't wash himself clean of his crimes, it's rendered here as exhilarating rock'n'roll, driven by McCoy's blasting harmonica riffs and Briggs' urgent piano vamping, with Elvis himself giving full vent to his vocal abilities. Says Putnam: "He would dive down here and he'd soar up there, and he'd pant into the mic. Elvis made all the primal sounds that human beings exhibit, from blissful love to a primal scream, in one song."

THE musicians came home in the small hours of June 8, many stunned by what had transpired. "It was like you'd just played four quarters of football and you won," says Putnam. "Everyone's gone, and you're sitting alone in your car, and can you get home without hitting a tree? It was exhilarating exhaustion."

The evening of June 8, they went back to RCA Studio B. It was as if the previous night's session hadn't happened. The five songs they recorded – "There Goes My Everything", "If I Were You", "Only Believe", "Sylvia" and "Patch It Up" – were the usual hotch-potch of mid-tempo ballads and love songs. They had completed 35 master-takes in five nights. Presley left Nashville shortly after. On August 10, he began what Colonel Tom Parker dubbed 'The Elvis Presley Summer Festival': a month-long residency at the International Hotel in Las Vegas, filmed as *Elvis: That's The Way It Is*, another triumph.

At some point during his tenure in Vegas, the decision was taken to release a country album drawn from the Nashville sessions. On September 22, Elvis returned to RCA Studio B. Four new songs were added to the 35 they'd cut back in June. Only two of those – Anne Murray's recent hit "Snowbird" and Jerry Lee Lewis' "Whole Lotta Shakin' Goin' On" – made the LP. But, as David Briggs recalls, the mood had gone: "James Burton wasn't on that session and we got Eddie Hinton, which was my idea as he was a great rock'n'roll player. But when Elvis came in and had all these sorta corny songs like 'Snowbird', it's hard to make them anything that's groovy."

Presley lacked enthusiasm for the material. Even before they began "Whole Lotta Shakin'..." he told his band, "We've been doing it too long already." However, David Briggs remembers that their fierce, authoritative take of "Whole Lotta Shakin'..." would come to mean a great deal to Elvis later: "This was just before he died, in '77, when we were supposed to be recording an LP with just piano in Graceland. He used to like to listen to that up in his bedroom when I was with him. He played 'Whole Lotta Shakin'...' every day, 'cos he liked what Jerry Carrigan played on the drums. He wore me out, he must have played it 50 times. 'Listen to this, listen to this!' 'I was there! I was there!' We were just playing around on songs like that... we'd just go, 'Jesus Christ!' and start jamming. It was a way of getting away from all that stuff he didn't like, the stack of bad songs the Colonel had always agreed to do for somebody."

THE first fruits of the sessions were released in November 1970, when *That's The Way It Is* reached No 8 on the country chart. *Elvis Country* was released on January 2, 1971, with the evocative subtitle, 'I'm 10,000 Years Old'. It reached No 12 on the *Billboard* Hot 100 – the highest place an Elvis LP would reach until his death in 1977. In his review for *Rolling Stone*, future Elvis biographer Peter Guralnick considered it among his best "since he first recorded for Sun almost 17 years ago... music that, while undeniably country, puts him in touch more directly with the soul singer."

The surfeit of recorded songs would be spread through two further two albums: *Love Letters From Elvis* in 1971 and 1972's *Elvis Now*. "Mostly it was just, 'everybody goes wild'," remembers David Briggs. "It was like a big gang-bang there. The engineers were lazy, some of them, and they were too busy dancing in the control room rather than working on the EQ. It's probably 10 per cent of what it could have been. And that's Elvis – that's the part that sounds great."

Briggs also contends that 1970 was a pivotal year for Presley, both in the studio and during his ever-expanding Vegas residency. "A lot of that stuff is when it started going bad. Maybe being so constricted in Memphis, when he did that great album, wore him out. Maybe he just didn't like to cut that way. Whereas before he'd sing softer, more in control and didn't sing hardly any bad notes, that was the start of his going down with his vocals. Singing in Vegas could have been a big part of it – that brassy, hard singing above the orchestra."

"It was a shared frustration with the band, that it went too fast and they could have done better," counters Ernst Mikael Jorgensen. "But Elvis never cared for perfection, if the thing had the feel." Elvis's exhilarated vocal outbursts on *Elvis Country* set the template for the unchecked soul of his best '70s singing, and the bombast of the worst. "He was in better shape to pull it off as a vocalist in 1970," Briggs concedes. "It was more special working with him than anybody else."

BACK in Bonn, James Burton turns over the sleeve of *Elvis Country* and runs a finger along the tracklisting, before letting it rest on the title, "I Was Born About Ten Thousand Years Ago". "If you go through all the generations of this guy's music in his life," he says, "he might well have been born 10,000 years ago. It was a natural, exciting thing, playing behind that voice. Playing all the hot licks, all at once."

COSMIC AMERICAN ELVIS

James Burton's guitar-playing skills can be heard on many albums aside from Elvis's records. Of chief interest will be his work on Gram Parsons' *GP* (1973) and *Grievous Angel* (1974).

"I MET Gram when I was playing on The Byrds' records, and of course Gram, me and Chris Hillman became friends," recalls Burton. "Did he and Elvis share an open approach to American music at the start of the '70s? Man, I don't know. Gram was into more of the storytelling, tearjerker music, like the Hank Williams and Merle Haggard-type singers – he was into that bag. He was a little more country, from the Hank Williams side of the music, the more traditional type. It was way different from Elvis. I don't think you can even mention them in the same sentence. Elvis's music was more forceful. Stronger. The background and even the songs were more powerful. And this particular album, *Elvis Country*, is not all country. Do I think that phrase of Gram's, Cosmic American Music, applies more naturally to what Elvis did? Oh yeah."

GAB ARCHIVE/REDFERNS; PHOTO12/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

Release Date: FEBRUARY 4, 1973 | *Record Label:* RCA RECORDS

ALOHA FROM HAWAII VIA SATELLITE

With the help of new technology, the Colonel attempts to crown Elvis as king of the world. He falls short, but the performance is one of Presley's final glories. | *By* **JASON ANDERSON**

THE show begins in darkness, the ominous silence soon punctuated with the opening fanfare of Richard Strauss's "Also Sprach Zarathustra". As performed by Joe Guercio's orchestra, the sound of the notes elicits a strange anticipation, as if the 6,000 people present in the Honolulu International Center on that January night in 1973 – as well as the millions more watching the live concert broadcast – were about to see the monolith from *2001: A Space Odyssey* once the lights came up. Instead what they beheld was the King in a white jumpsuit with rhinestones in the shape of an American eagle, a sight even more awe-inspiring than anything Stanley Kubrick could've conjured up. As suggested by the cover of the live album documenting this historic event, it seems entirely plausible to believe that Elvis Presley was so spectacular that night, he could be seen from outer space.

Rush-released a few weeks following the broadcast, *Aloha From Hawaii Via Satellite* was Presley's final album to reach No 1 on the *Billboard* charts in his lifetime. That feat was even more impressive given the risks of it being lost amid the era's glut of cash-in releases overseen by Colonel Tom Parker, including the previous November's *Burning Love And Hits From His Movies, Volume 2* and a slew of others on RCA's budget Camden label. Critics at the time were not especially kind. "Schmaltz" was *The New York Times*' judgment of Presley when the special belatedly debuted on American TV.

Nevertheless, the performance documented on the album's four sides – initially presented in quadraphonic sound, making this the first ever chart-topper to use the format – offers reasons to feel more generous. While the Presley of early 1973 is too inconsistent to match the bravura of his '68 comeback self, *Aloha From Hawaii Via Satellite* still demonstrates the renewal of his energies spurred by his return to live performance, especially whenever he could escape the interminable Vegas engagements preferred by the travel-averse Colonel. A vivid memento of Presley's first Big Apple shows since the '50s, *Elvis As Recorded At Madison Square Garden* (1972) anticipated the Honolulu triumph with its own bursts of old-school vitality. And as he did then, he sounds utterly committed to the task at hand, with things really cooking whenever he demonstrates a deep connection with the material or with loyal bandmates like guitarist James Burton and drummer Ronnie Tutt.

Compared to the three breezy movies that brought Presley to Hawaii in the '60s, his return was better characterised by an almost NASA-worthy sense of mission and purpose. Having seen the live television coverage of President Nixon's trip to China, the Colonel was excited by the idea of staging a concert with a truly global reach and announced the plan at the end of Presley's run at the Las Vegas Hilton in September of 1972. A producer who'd overseen specials for Bing Crosby and Don Ho as well as the Academy Awards telecast, Marty Pasetta was hired for the special, which was planned for shortly after midnight on January 14, 1973. After attending a listless concert in Long Beach in November, Pasetta had serious concerns about the quality of the show and the singer's own condition. Presley's team took his criticisms seriously, implementing the producer's cuts and changes. Presley – who turned 38 shortly

Elvis Presley performs onstage at the International Convention Center in Honolulu Hawaii on January 14 1973

MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES)

before the concert – proved his commitment by losing 10 pounds in weight.

Dominated by close-ups of this hale, healthy yet still plenty sweaty Elvis, the hour-long special was a huge success. That said, the claim that it reached over a billion people watching live worldwide was more of the Colonel's bunk – viewers in Australia, the Pacific islands and parts of Asia were the only ones to see the broadcast as it beamed out from Intelsat IV F-4. A 90-minute version with several numbers not in the original concert aired in the US in April. Since there was no UK broadcast at all until after Presley's death, British fans made do with the recording.

Thankfully, *Aloha From Hawaii Via Satellite* is strong enough to rank with Presley's most compelling albums of the '70s. Even those who deem that as faint praise ought to appreciate the swagger of Presley and his players in the concert's greatest moments, starting with Tutt's thunderous intro for "See See Rider". The momentum continues on "Burning Love", Presley clearly energised by the invaluable support from pianist Glen D Hardin and the Sweet Inspirations. After bringing down the tempo for an endearingly louche take on George Harrison's "Something" and a satisfyingly dramatic "You Gave Me A Mountain", Presley and the band use "Steamroller Blues" as a fine excuse to get loose and lewd, thereby transforming James Taylor's cheeky blues parody into the genuine article. Leaning hard into lines like "*I'm a napalm bomb for you, baby!*" the singer sounds like he's having a helluva good time.

Presley enjoys himself a little too much in the medley of '50s hits that soon follows, but he and his band rally again in the show's second half.

★★★

Released: 1973-2013 | Record Label: RCA

ELVIS (AKA THE FOOL ALBUM)
RAISED ON ROCK/FOR OL' TIMES SAKE
GOOD TIMES
PROMISED LAND
ELVIS AT STAX

When personal strife confines the singer to his home, a visit to Stax proves to be a vital spark in Elvis's creative life. | *By* **TERRY STAUNTON**

THE last significant hands-on act of Colonel Tom Parker's tenure as Elvis Presley's manager was the groundbreaking satellite broadcast concert commemorated on the 1973 multi-million selling album *Aloha From Hawaii*. In the same month, the singer renegotiated his contract with RCA, ostensibly taking over the reins of his own career to afford him more creative control going forward (albeit with the Colonel still lurking in the wings), but the newfound freedom came at a price.

It perhaps wasn't the ideal moment for him to embark on a fresh, hopefully more fruitful path, as away from the music there were uncomfortable matters closer to home. Already separated from wife Priscilla, his divorce proceedings were ongoing, including questions over how the couple's shared custody of four-year-old daughter Lisa Marie would work, given Elvis's professional commitments.

"It was a period of great opportunity, but it was also a bad time in his life," writer, filmmaker and Memphis archivist Robert Gordon said in 2013. "On the one hand, doors that Colonel Parker had previously kept shut were beginning to open for him, and on the other he was wrestling with important, emotionally draining upheavals in private."

As part of the new deal, RCA gave the singer a generous lump sum in exchange for the rights to repackage his back catalogue and any unreleased recordings in any way they saw fit. Keen to capitalise on the enormous success of the satellite show, they plundered the vaults for **Elvis** (RCA, 1973) ★★★ and found some choice "leftovers" cut two years previously in Nashville.

To fill out the LP and push its running time over the minimum requirement of 30 minutes, Presley decamped to the studio to complete two new tracks, both melodramatic ballads. "Where Do I Go From Here?" came from the pen of Paul Williams, at the time best known for co-writing the Carpenters hits "We've Only Just Begun" and "Rainy Days And Mondays", while "Fool" was an English language rewrite of a song by German bandleader James Last.

The appearance of the latter's title directly under the singer's name on the front sleeve of the LP led to it becoming known among fans as 'The Fool Album', but that arguably serves to give unwarranted attention to a song longtime Elvis watchers suspect was hurriedly knocked off to fulfil a request, rather than a genuine sign of where he was heading. It pales in comparison to many tracks from the '71 Nashville sessions, like stately covers of two songs by R&B figurehead Ivory Joe Hunter ("It's Still Here", "I Will Be True"), or the flighty country shuffle of Bob Dylan's "Don't Think Twice (It's All Right)".

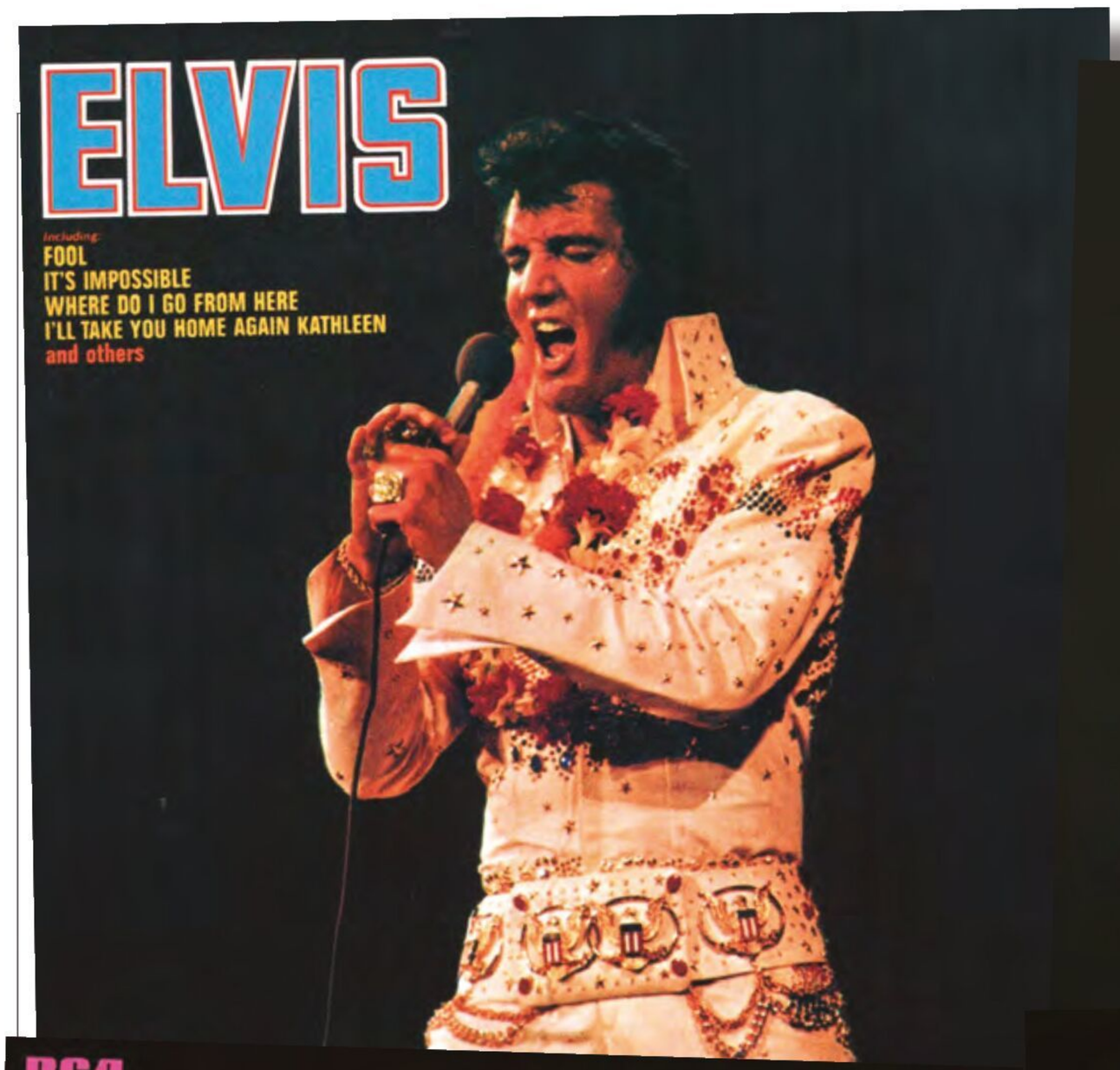
To all intents and purposes, it would be the next album that signalled Presley's rebirth-of-sorts, via his first visit to an iconic studio in his adopted hometown. Memphis had always been good to Elvis, from the electrifying, epochal sides he cut with Sam Phillips at Sun in his formative years, to the 1969 sessions at producer Chips Moman's American Sound Studios that spawned such hits as "In The Ghetto", "Suspicious Minds" and "Kentucky Rain".

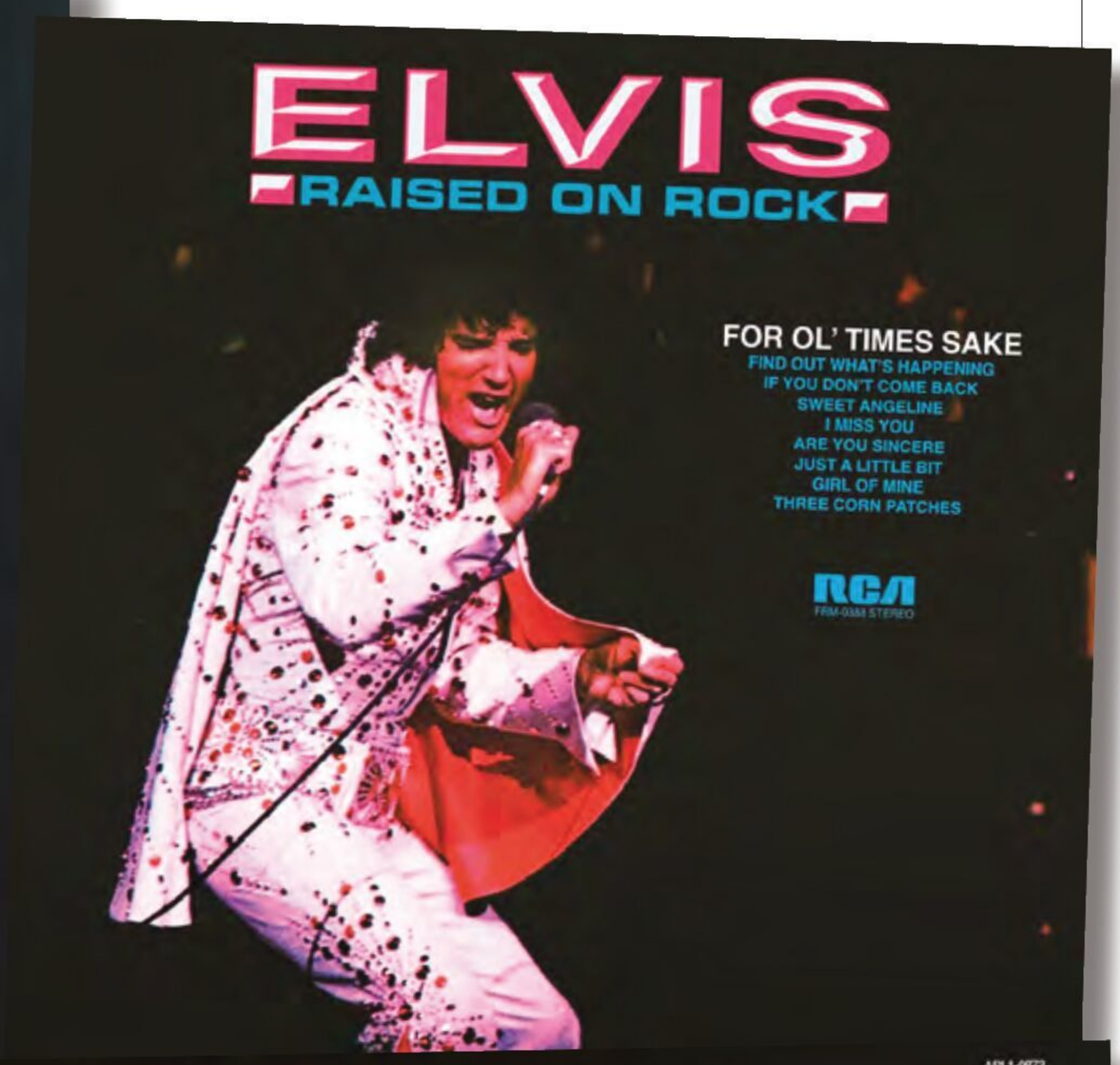
Now, reluctant to venture too far from Graceland while access to Lisa Marie was the subject of legal wrangles, he again wanted a studio on his doorstep. Sun had been inactive since Philips sold it in the late '60s and Moman had recently closed American Sound to concentrate on a new recording complex in Atlanta, Georgia. Local impresario Marty Lacker, who'd first introduced the singer to Moman, made a suggestion.

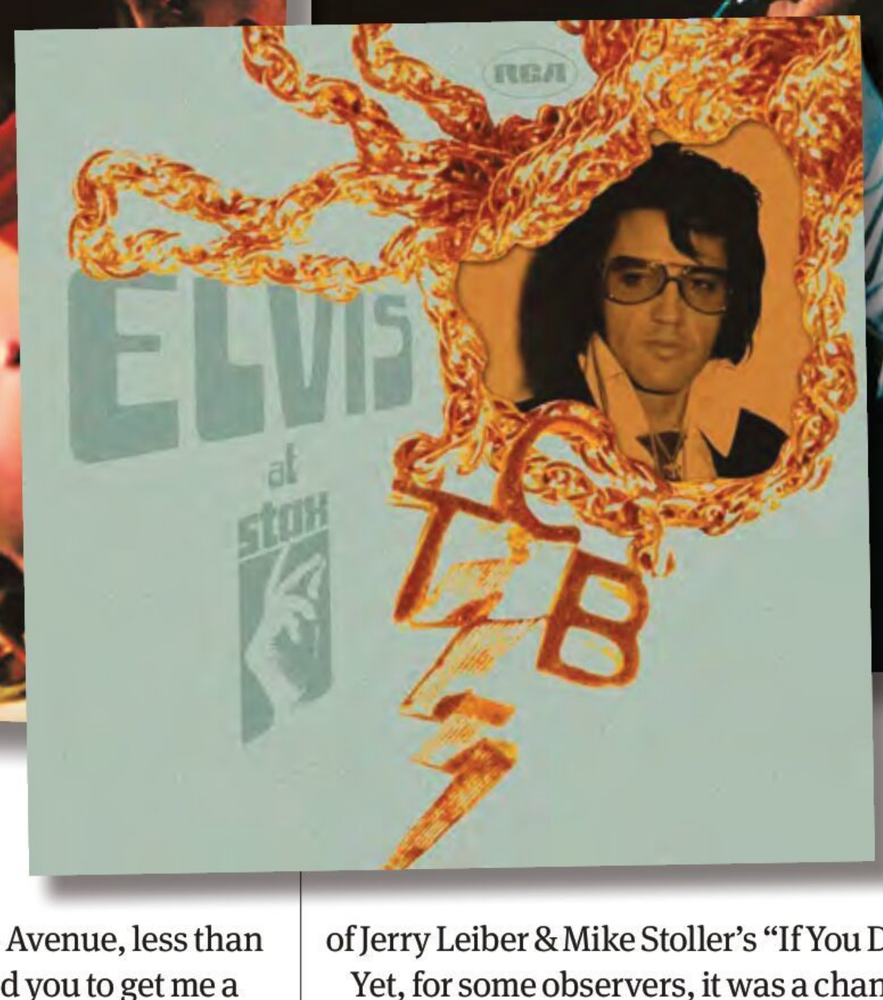
CRITICS' VERDICTS

RAISED ON ROCK/FOR OL' TIMES SAKE

"It's an album of loosely retrospective and largely repetitive 12-bars and slow ballads, with an air of fashionable self-deprecation about it. 'Hey buddy, this is how I started, but I'm older and wiser now' – that sort of thing."
KG, MELODY MAKER, 08/12/1973







Stax Records, home to an acclaimed stable of soul stars, including Otis Redding, Sam & Dave, Eddie Floyd and two formidable house bands, Booker T & the MG's and The Bar-Kays, was based in a former cinema in McLemore Avenue, less than a 10-minute drive from Graceland. "Elvis said to me, 'I need you to get me a studio here in Memphis,' and there was only one thought in my mind," Lacker recalled years later.

"He loved the records coming out of Stax; he knew of Isaac [*Hayes*], the Staple Singers, Rufus Thomas, all those folks, and there was that extra added enticement that he didn't have to go far to work."

On paper, The King embarking on a new chapter at a soul powerhouse arguably second only to Motown in Detroit, looked a winner, but the five days of sessions in July '73 didn't catch fire as much as everyone hoped. Eight cuts made it onto **Raised On Rock** (RCA, 1973) ★★★, the highlights being the scorching title track (courtesy of "Suspicious Minds" tunesmith Mark James), the mellow country soul of Tony Joe White's "For Ol' Times' Sake" (itself routinely added to the LP's title for reasons similar to 'The Fool Album'), and the prickly funk of Jerry Leiber & Mike Stoller's "If You Don't Come Back".

Yet, for some observers, it was a chance maybe not missed but not exploited in full. "When you have these two huge icons from the same city you want it to be a blend of those two forces, but it wasn't the historic thing you might expect from a Presley/Stax combination," recalled Gordon. "It was more of a facility rental for Elvis; other than a couple of backing tracks, there weren't a lot of Stax players involved."

Those players, strapping in alongside Presley regulars guitarist James Burton, keyboard player Bobby Emmons and drummer Ron Tutt, were the MG's rhythm section of Donald "Duck" Dunn and Al Jackson, plus

★★★

★★★

Mess of blue: on stage in Uniondale, NY, July 19, 1975

time of Elvis's last release featuring recordings from the Stax sessions, no fewer than 20 albums had been issued showing him [*on stage*] wearing a jumpsuit. This repetitious process undeniably abetted a lack of clear focus on his studio-recorded repertoire, and the presentation of his Stax tracks was no exception.

"In defence of RCA, fiscally and commercially, it's unlikely that any other record company would have done things differently. His management, in the guise of Colonel Parker, still pulled the strings when it came to supplying photos, all of which had to be returned to them after use. In this regard, even Elvis was somewhat complicit."

Perhaps paying attention to both the music and his image was too much of a responsibility for the singer, especially at a time when his marriage was collapsing, but the days and nights he spent at Stax, while first dogged by unforeseen technical glitches, stand as an assured statement of intent.

The boxset bonus material in particular, with its inclusion of between-song discussions and on-the-hoof tweaks to arrangements, reflects the spontaneity and sense of adventure of a man truly engaged with his work, capturing the essence of a King, though bruised and battered, searching for – and finding – the inspiration he needed to hold onto his crown.

TRACKMARKS | ELVIS | RAISED ON ROCK/FOR OL'TIMES SAKE | GOOD TIMES | PROMISED LAND | ELVIS AT STAX

ELVIS (AKA THE FOOL ALBUM)
★★★
Label: RCA
Released: 1973
Highest chart position: UK 16; US 52

RAISED ON ROCK/FOR OL' TIMES SAKE
★★★
Label: RCA
Released: 1973
Highest chart position: UK –; US 50

GOOD TIMES
★★★★
Label: RCA
Released: 1974
Highest chart position: UK 42; US 90

PROMISED LAND
★★★★
Label: RCA
Released: 1975
Highest chart position: UK 21; US 47

ELVIS AT STAX
★★★★★
Label: RCA
Released: 2013
Highest chart position: UK 70; US –

RON GALELLA/RON GALELLA COLLECTION VIA GETTY IMAGES

Released: 1975-1977 | Record Label: RCA

ELVIS TODAY/ FROM ELVIS PRESLEY BOULEVARD, MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE/ MOODY BLUE/ ELVIS IN CONCERT

The last recordings. After a final trip to the studio, the King returns home. | *By* NICK HASTED

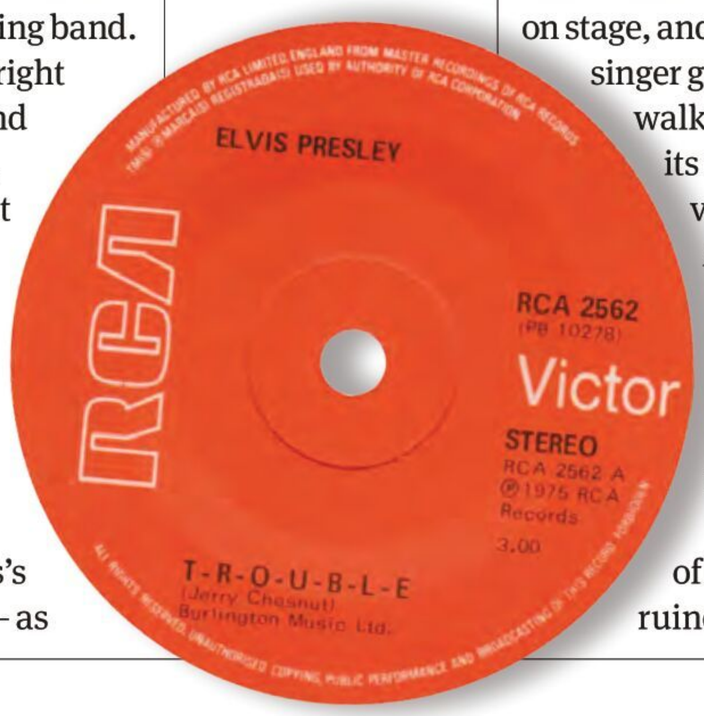
THE nameless malaise which afflicted Elvis in his last years was at its worst in the studio, which he'd managed to avoid altogether in 1974. Colonel Parker had filled the contractual obligation for two annual albums with the perfunctory *Elvis Recorded Live On Stage In Memphis* and the humiliating *Having Fun With Elvis On Stage*, a compendium of conversational goofs and rambles initially sold at gigs on the Colonel's own label, which finally removed the tiresome necessity of musical content, or dignity, from his shifting of Elvis product. It also cruelly emphasised his charge's growing eccentricity, daring the listener to notice. Like his eventually much-aired guffaw through "Are You Lonesome Tonight", it sealed the cliché of Elvis the '70s clown. Even on the majestic title track of 1975's first, 1973-taped album *Promised Land*, close attention had found the singer a touch breathless at the pace, with much of the thrill sustained by his rocketing band.

Things were already very wrong, and would rarely be right again. The early-'70s afterburn of Elvis's late-'60s live and studio comebacks had resulted in some of his most raw, maturely emotional work, but that second Presley comet now finished its fall to earth. Vegas engagements and tours kept him busy, but once exhilarating shows had become puzzling, informal, inchoate things, at the mercy of their star's drug dosage. Worrying hospital stays broke up his schedule, and a plastic surgery "tuck" stole some of his sultry looks. Reviewers who had only recently testified to his matchless live charisma now compared the spectacle to Liberace. Elvis's loose cannon ways were more like The Doors' last days – as the band awaited the singer's next rambling outburst. Musicians who'd been away a while were shocked at his ennui, which had spread to the band. "The music had always felt nervous to me because the energy was so high, even the ballads," bassist Jerry Scheff told Peter Guralnick of rejoining 1975's lineup. Now, "everything had slipped down a couple of notches".

Elvis was dragged into RCA's Hollywood studio in March 1975, for the generally desultory session heard on **Elvis Today** (RCA) ★★. The cover's live shot showed his face turned the other way than it had been on *Promised Land* – but it was otherwise identical, while the title reheated *Elvis Now* with the hollow optimism of a Sly Stone comeback. You could almost hear the barrel being scraped.

Opening track "T-R-O-U-B-L-E", which grazed the US Top 40 as a single, is a "Big Boss Man"-style rocker from skilled Nashville writer Jerry Chesnut (the other Elvis made a bigger hit of his "Good Year For The Roses"). The band rev up Elvis as they would on stage, and he screams and exhorts in the role of a nightclub singer goggle-eyed when a devilishly gorgeous woman walks in. The Pointer Sisters' "Fairy Tale" adds fiddle to its countrypolitan hoedown and Elvis's slightly wild vocal. Faye Adams' big 1953 R&B chart-topper "Shake A Hand" is revived with sultry New Orleans swagger, but little substance, and "Pieces Of My Life" invites introspection over David Briggs' clavinet, Elvis shaky but convincing as a washed-up singer, "*carrying on, living on songs*". Mediocre country mostly prevails elsewhere, Elvis out of ideas today.

The generally weak songs on *Today* were a failure of Felton Jarvis's selection skills, Colonel Tom's ruinous royalty arrangements, the decline of Elvis's



compensatory pop appeal, and his studio indifference. While the '70s rock world was revering self-expressive singer-songwriters, Elvis was reduced to the fag-end of Music Row's publishers, and covering second-hand recent hits. There's an element of illusion to his albums by now, an assembly line sweetening in the overdubbed string and brass arrangements, which sometimes stumble on a hook or pop moment the bored singer didn't manage to locate himself. The multiple vocal groups now being employed – JD Sumner & The Stamps, Voice and more – similarly shore him up. Yet what still defined every Elvis record was the vocal commitment of a singer who could make the worst hokum believable, if he meant it.

Elvis's final two studio albums were recorded at Graceland, in the den tucked behind the kitchen, thick shagpile carpets deadening the sound, with cables trailing out to RCA's Mobile Studio. There was nowhere else left to go. **From Elvis Presley Boulevard, Memphis, Tennessee**'s **(RCA VICTOR, 1976)** ★★★ title tried to make a virtue of the situation. When Elvis turned up in disguise wearing the Denver policeman's uniform he'd just been gifted, though, it was clear there was a way to go. The archive release *Way Down In The Jungle Room* tries to reclaim this period. Its outtakes build a gripping, vérité picture of Elvis impatiently breaking off takes, blaming band mistakes, but clearly struggling for focus and confidence himself.

He at least found slightly stronger material. "Hurt" opens with a bellow, an unsteady expression of pain as mannered as it is primal. Willie Nelson's "Blue Eyes Crying In The Rain" centres on James Burton bending notes, and Roger Whittaker's "The Last Farewell" has a touch of "Galveston" as

★★★

Elvis finds tear-jerking common cause with a wartime English sailor pining for home, over cinematic, martial arrangements. There's a chivalrous romance he responds to.

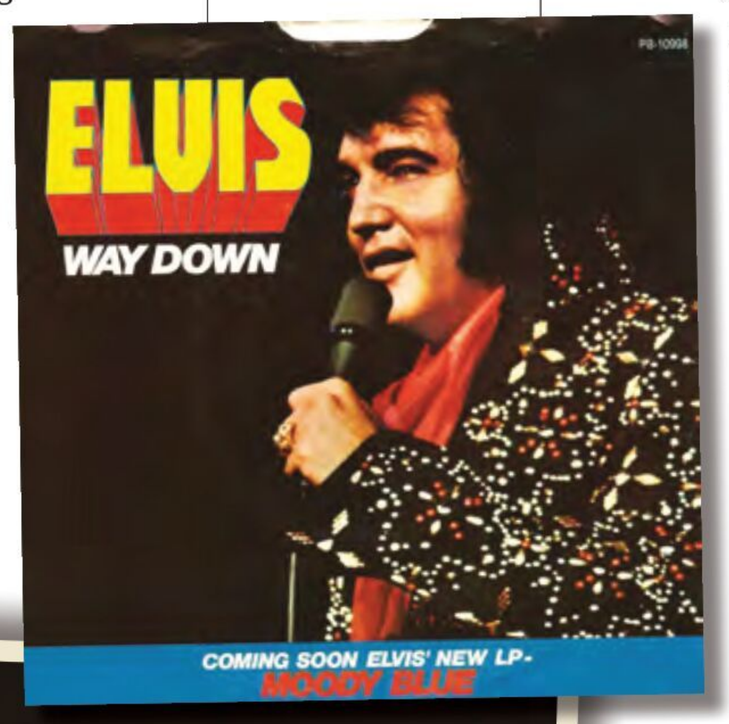
"Danny Boy" is a close-up performance with David Briggs at the piano, a Vernon Presley favourite worked on for several takes to wring every drop of lachrymose feeling from this death-haunted Irish standard, Briggs playing gospel-style, with Elvis tender. The backing vocalists support his final, frail high note, which sounds ready to expire itself. Mostly, Elvis at 41 ignored the atom-splitting excitement of his "That's All Right" youth for such songs of gloomy sentiment. They reflected a life of divorce, hapless romance with a succession of young partners, and drugged drift. When the mood struck, he still sang the heart out of them.

The home sessions had started propitiously with "Way Down", a weird, natural rock'n'roll hit by Layng Martine Jr. It was in a way a novelty song, hanging on JD Sumner's subterranean harmony ("*Way on down...*"). It was also a playful sex song, with lyrics sometimes so filthy Elvis surely couldn't mean it, down there "*where it feels so good... where I hoped it would*". Maybe Status Quo's ur-boogie smash "Down Down", with its relentlessly plummeting vibe, was in there, too. From James Burton's efficiently motoring riff to the funk twang noting that, outside Graceland, this was the year of disco, it was a remarkably effective production.

"Way Down" became the second single from **Moody Blue** (RCA, 1977) ★★★, which took its name from "Burning Love" writer Mark James' catchy, semi-country tune. Both unusually commercial songs buoy yet more sorrowful ballads of betrayal, such as the stately "She Thinks I Still Care", string-laden "He'll Have To Go", and the Andrew Lloyd Webber-Tim Rice tune "It's Easy For You", which has Elvis railing at the mistress he's left his family for. He enjoyed these anguished, adult, often self-righteous scenarios, mostly Nashville-sourced soap operas sadly much like his life.

★★★★★★★★★★★★

HE BREATHES WITH AWFUL EFFORT AS HE'S FILMED PREPARING TO SING "UNCHAINED MELODY"



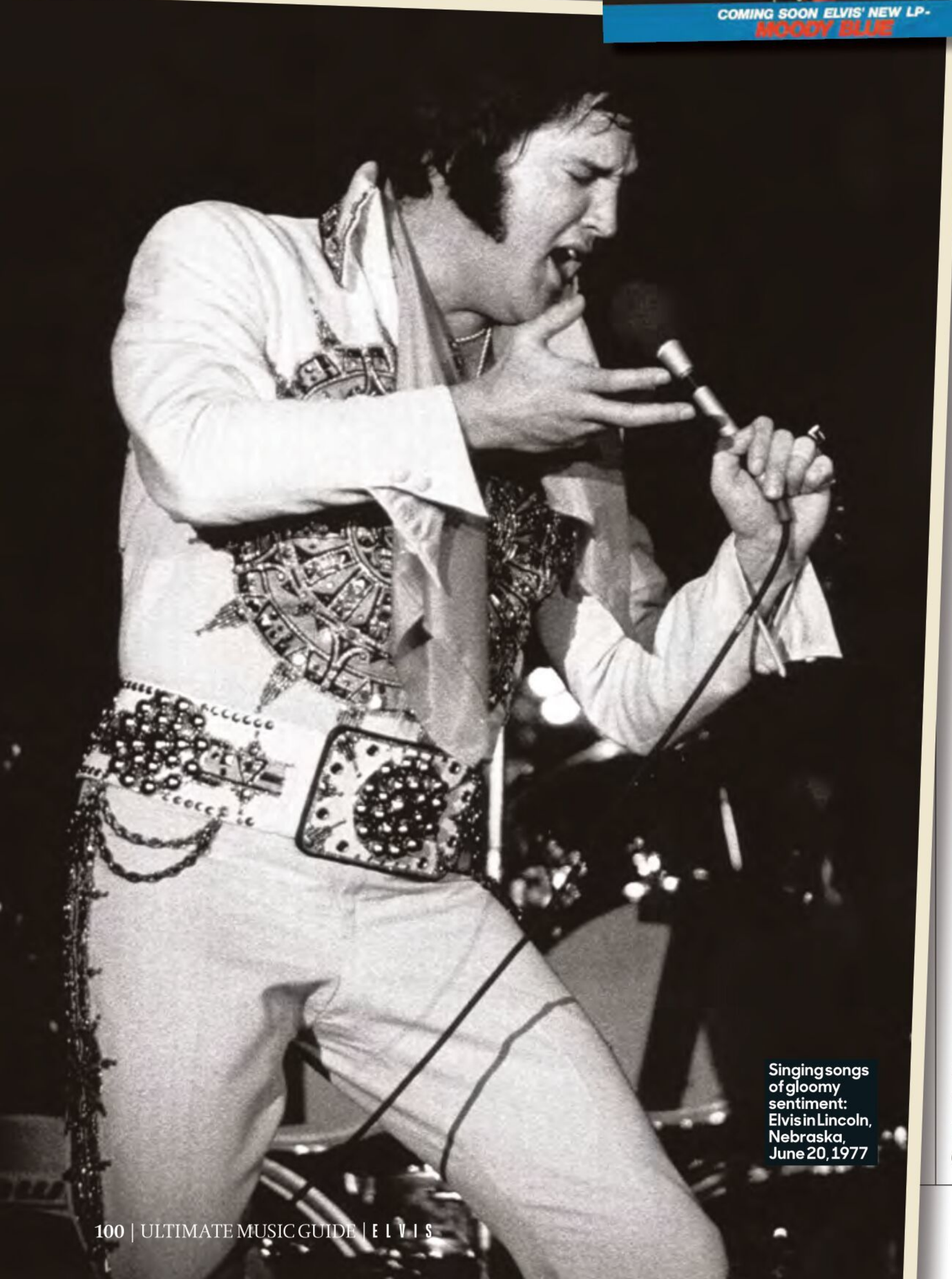
The Graceland sessions couldn't fill a second album. Three live songs were taped as ballast, and two gigs were also filmed in June 1977 for a TV special. The live song which opened *Moody Blue*, the Righteous Brothers' "Unchained Melody", has become emblematic of Elvis's last months. It was a regular live set piece, but hindsight has added the lustre of an embattled last stand. *Moody Blue*'s version is from Ann Arbor, Michigan, on April 24. "Unchained Melody" is already a song of shivering melodrama and overwrought romance. "*Oh, my love, my darling*", Elvis begins, "*I hunger for your touch...*" There's a hint of Roy Orbison when he climbs into the first, premonitory peak. Then he meets the rippling momentum of his own piano, matching the lyric's "*river*", and holds the last, gigantic high note. It's an exhilarating start to *Moody Blue*.

The version filmed for the TV special in Rapid City, Iowa, on June 21 is something else. It was cut from the special's posthumous screening and accompanying soundtrack album. The first night in Omaha had been traumatically bad, with Elvis's voice gone the way Ali was gone in his last fights. He rallied a little in Rapid City, but still looks nervous and breathes with awful effort as he's filmed preparing to sing "Unchained Melody". There's confusion as he sits at the piano, Charlie Hodge finally holding his mic shakily in front of his face. But as he masters the melody, he flashes a beautiful, bashfully sexy Elvis smile at the camera. "*Time goes by,*" he cries, "*and time can do so much*". Time has certainly taken a bitter toll on the Sun Records king, but as he hits that huge climactic note, face filling the screen, he no longer looks bloated and deathly, but a singer working with all his primal might. It's a note with life and death in it, followed by a perfectly modulated descent. Elvis fans cling to this triumph salvaged from terminal collapse as an article of faith, showing all was never lost, even so near the end. The pride that took him from Tupelo still flared.

"Bright Eyes Crying In The Rain" was the last music Elvis made, picking at a song he liked on the Graceland piano on August 15, 1977. He was found dead the next day. "Way Down" went to No 1 in the UK, the concert footage deemed too shocking to release was televised as *Elvis In Concert* in October, and the soundtrack album became his first posthumous release.

The **Elvis In Concert** double album (RCA, 1977) ★★★ is somewhere between a live document, one of Colonel Parker's carny souvenirs and a rushed elegy. It opens with a collage of giddy fans, whose adoration is untouchably sincere. "I think he'll be just as good-looking," says one. "Just older."

"Also Sprach Zarathustra" and "See See Rider" meanwhile build stampeding momentum, the latter a long, vamping set-up for Elvis's eventual, breathless exhortations. Having opened hundreds of shows, it's been degraded from song to half-forgotten ritual. "Don't let the lights and cameras throw you," he tells his fans solicitously. "But they are hot..." He sounds worried about his own heavy body wilting. "That's All Right" gets a typically tight and sly James Burton solo, but the music of his foundational hit happens around his scattered voice, which barely hits notes or bothers with words. "Mostly the tunes were done so fast, we just ran over them," bassist Emory Gordy told Peter Guralnick of the deterioration in live nuance and



Singing songs of gloomy sentiment: Elvis in Lincoln, Nebraska, June 20, 1977

BETTMANN/GETTY IMAGES

Nashville-sourced soap operas at the Civic Center, Providence, May 23, 1977

feel, as early as 1973. "Jailhouse Rock" is accordingly taken at double-time, creating thin, ersatz excitement.

"Are You Lonesome Tonight" is, not for the first time, a garbled put-on ("Who am I talking to?... Ah, the heck with it"). "How Great Thou Art" is the highlight, summoning tension and commitment, and then the lyrics' "*rolling thunder*" as, backed by the Stamps followed by the Sweet Inspirations, with their white and black gospel traditions, Elvis turns spirituality into pulverising, overwhelming force. "My Way", a big hit when released as a single (and even more fraudulently bullish than Sinatra's version, given where his way left him), also trades in wild vocal muscle. "Unchained Melody" is a finer example of this. Elvis had become prone to punching his way out of trouble, only raised from his prevailing stupor by the roaring exercise of his once-pristine, pitch-perfect voice.

The second disc throws in offcuts from both filmed shows: funny and confident on "Trying To Get To You" ("My dad loves this song"), and in stinging '50s consort with Burton on "Little Sister". The true end, though, is Vernon Presley's recorded message, which concludes disc one. "I'd like to thank you for the many cards and letters, and the flowers that you've sent my family in our time of grief," he says, breaking off with a shuddering sigh, "over the loss of our son, Elvis." Posthumous releases have made the performer immortal, but this is the moment on record where we remember Elvis the human being, and bid him farewell.

TRACKMARKS | ELVIS TODAY | FROM ELVIS PRESLEY BOULEVARD... | MOODY BLUE | ELVIS IN CONCERT

ELVIS TODAY
★★
Label: RCA, 1975
Produced by: Felton Jarvis
Highest chart position: UK 48; US 57

FROM ELVIS PRESLEY BOULEVARD, MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE
★★★
Label: RCA, 1976
Produced by: Felton Jarvis
Highest chart position: UK 29; US 41

MOODY BLUE
★★★
Label: RCA, 1977
Produced by: Felton Jarvis
Highest chart position: UK 3; US 3

ELVIS IN CONCERT
★★★
Label: RCA, 1977
Produced by: Felton Jarvis
Highest chart position: UK 13; US 5

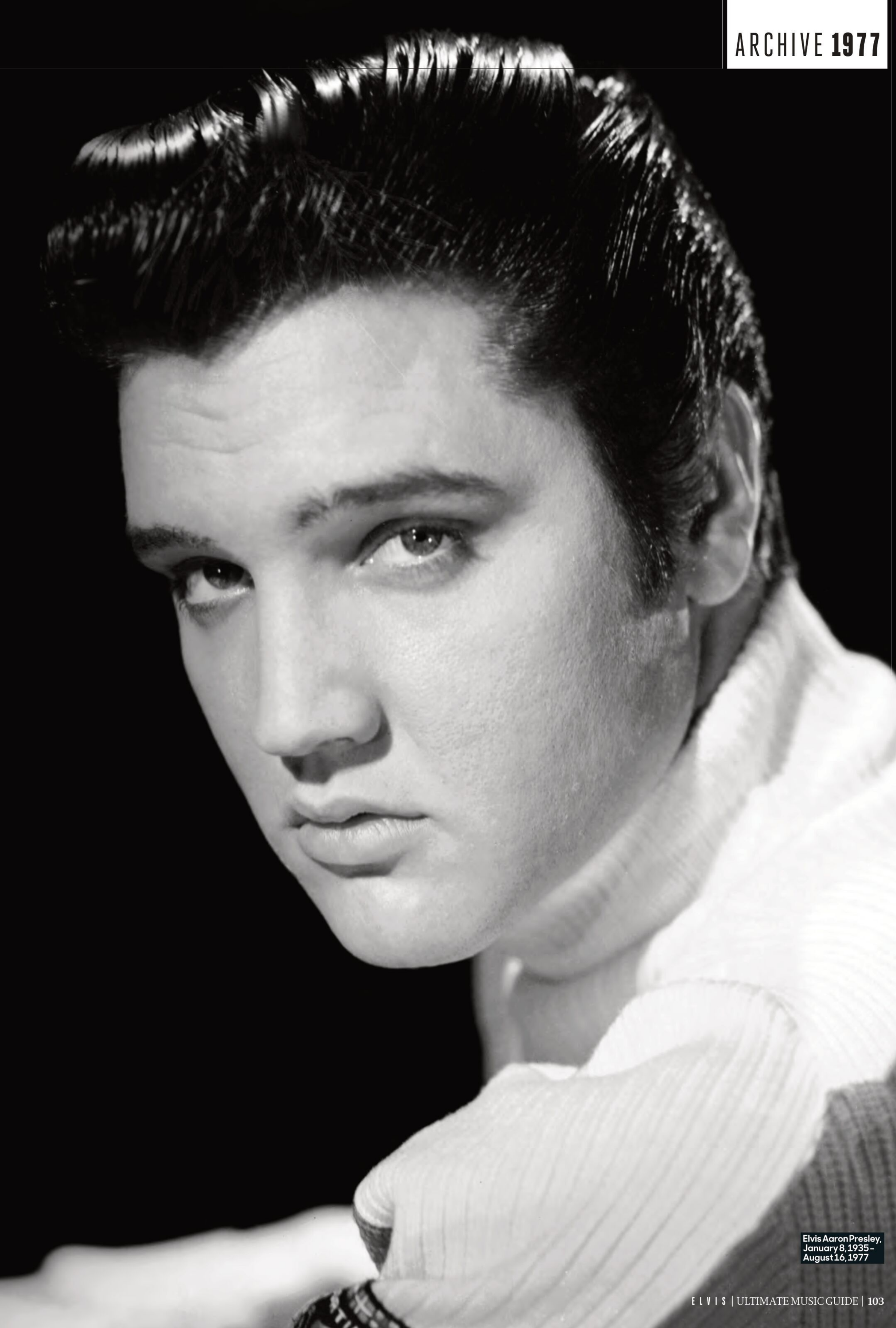
ROBERT EMERSON/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

Elvis

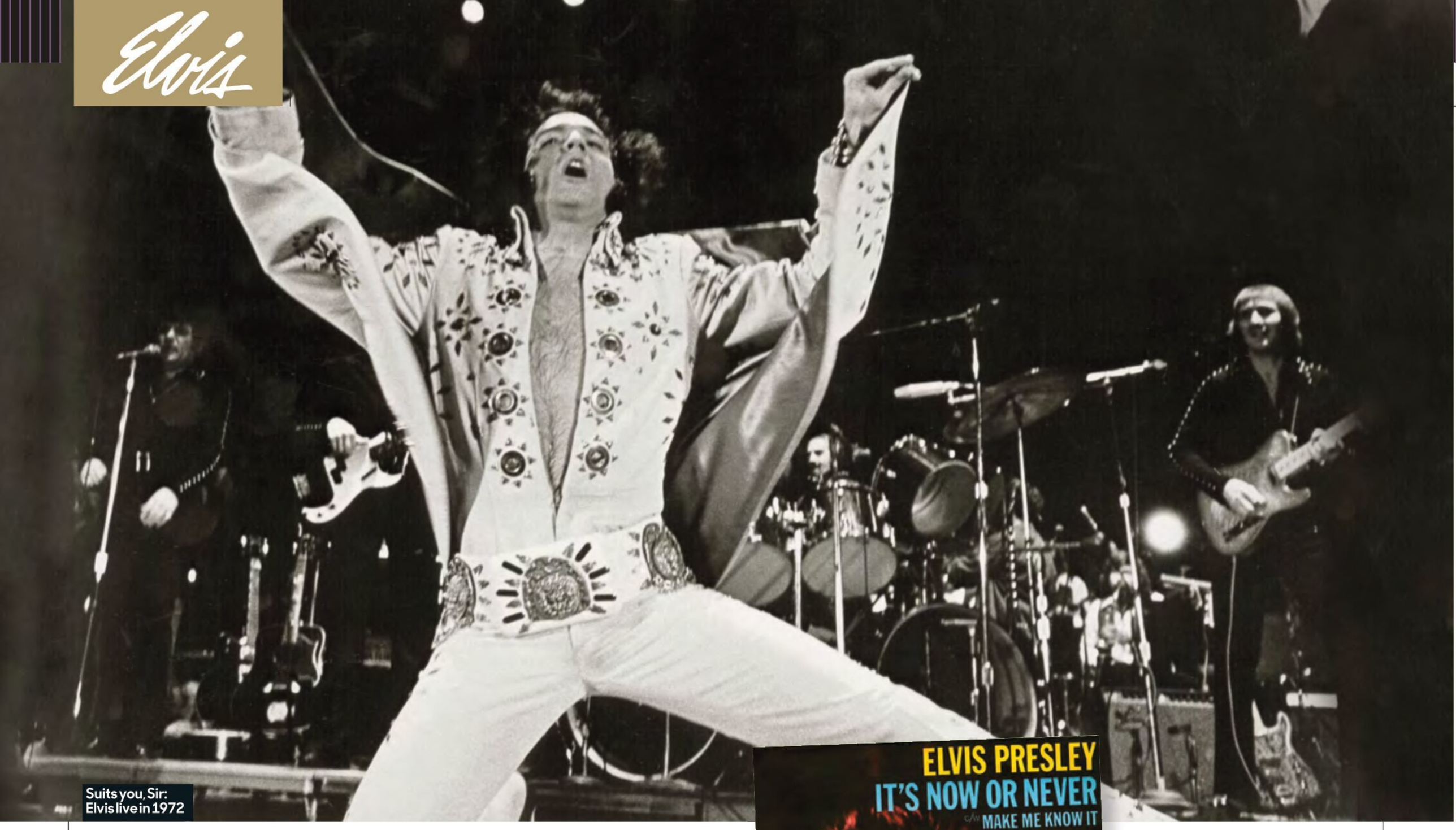
"The greatest pop idol in the world"

Elvis's death, like many of his last years, remains shrouded in mystery. While the facts of his demise remain debated, his influence is easier to quantify, and everyone from punk rockers to contemporaries, to the President of the United States has an opinion to share. Elvis, says Jimmy Carter, was "a symbol of the vitality, rebelliousness and good humour of this country".

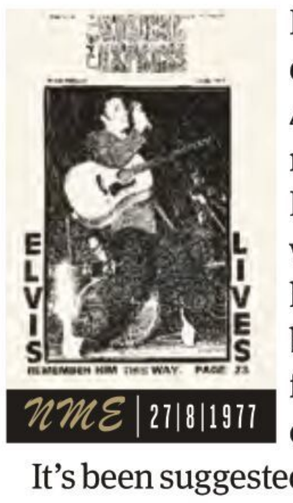
SUNSET BOULEVARD/CORBIS VIA GETTY IMAGES



Elvis Aaron Presley,
January 8, 1935 –
August 16, 1977



Suits you, Sir: Elvis live in 1972



NME | 27|8|1977

ELVIS PRESLEY's sudden death last week, at the age of 42, leaves a mystery that will remain unsolved for all time. No-one will ever know exactly what killed him. Officially he died from a heart attack, but doubtless this was the final result of numerous contributory factors.

It's been suggested that Presley had become addicted to drugs. His former bodyguard Red West claims the singer was taking dozens of pills, and giving himself several injections, every day. Even his ex-wife Priscilla admitted to reporters that he had a serious drugs problem.

But country medical examiner Dr Jerry Francisco, who performed the post-mortem, contradicted this. "If the use of drugs was that frequent, we would have found some evidence in our examination," he said, adding that only drugs taken for hypertension and a colon problem had been found in the body. The death certificate shows that Presley died from "cardiac arrhythmia". Dr Francisco described this as a severely irregular heartbeat, possibly caused by high blood pressure and a coronary artery disease. "Elvis died in four minutes and no-one could have saved him," he stated. Presley's personal doctor said that "any one of a number of things could have killed him".

The fact is that Presley's health had been deteriorating steadily since 1973. He had been in hospital five times in the past four years, and was treated for hypoglycemia (sugar deficiency), intestinal blockage, "recurrent pneumonia", gastric flu, fatigue and eye problems, as well as his obesity.

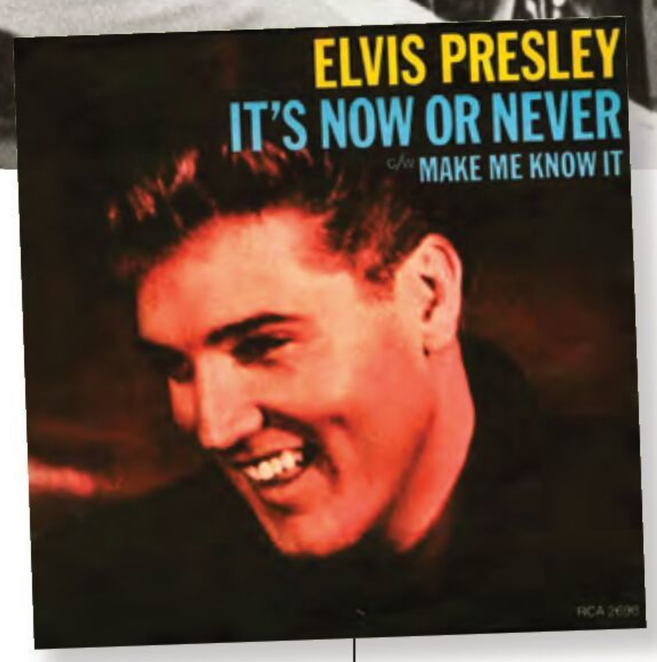
He collapsed on stage at Baltimore as recently as April 10, and his constant efforts to lose weight must have aggravated his heart condition. Only minutes before he died, he was dripping with sweat after a hectic ball game.

Even so, he was determined to continue performing. He was to have played a concert in his hometown of Memphis last Saturday, when reportedly he would have announced his engagement to 20-year-old Ginger Alden whom he planned to marry at Christmas. And ironically, his manager Colonel Tom Parker had recently returned from Japan and Australia, after setting up the first leg of the singer's projected 1978 world tour. Parker was due to visit Britain later this year.

Presley was interred in the family mausoleum, 300 yards from his mother's grave, in Memphis cemetery last Thursday. This is now destined to become a shrine to his memory. His body was embalmed, so ensuring its preservation – presumably until his tomb is opened in the distant future.

Another mystery surrounds the amount of money left by Presley. During his career, he earned an estimated 7,000 million dollars, but he spent it on a lavish scale, and set up huge trust funds for his daughter Lisa. He is believed to have kept 35 million dollars in his current bank account, but the full extent of his fortune will take months – possibly years – to assess. And it will continue to increase, as additional royalties flow in.

His death has led to a boom in Presley record sales. RCA, who earlier this year reissued his 16 British No 1 hits, are distributing further large quantities of this set to dealers. But they are not planning any immediate new releases or rush memorial albums. Said an RCA spokesman: "We are simply fulfilling demand for the existing catalogue. To do anything else would, at this stage, be in bad taste." In fact, five of Presley's most recent releases – two singles and three albums – have shot into the *NME* Charts this week.



RCA had already planned to re-release the soundtracks of five of his 33 films in October – *Girls Girls Girls*, *Fun In Acapulco*, *Kissin' Cousins*, *Loving You* and *Roustabout* – and they intend going ahead with this plan, as well as a Greatest Hits elpee in November.

A total of 47 Presley singles each sold over a million copies, with the biggest seller of all, "It's Now Or Never", amassing almost 10 million. His aggregate global sales are in the region of 300 million (national press reports of 500 million sales are exaggerated, probably counting each album as six separate units), making him the world's second biggest record seller of all time.

He also held the world's largest collection of Gold Discs – over 100. But many of these were from smaller territories, where it is not necessary to sell a million to qualify for a trophy. There is likely to be a steady supply of new Presley material for two or three years. RCA have "a fair number" of unreleased tracks in the can, and only recently he recorded a batch of songs in his own private studio. ***DEREK JOHNSON***

PICTURELUX/THEHOLLYWOODARCHIVE/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

"WE ARE SIMPLY FULFILLING DEMAND FOR THE EXISTING CATALOGUE. TO DO ANYTHING ELSE WOULD, AT THIS TIME, BE IN BAD TASTE" *RCA spokesman*

MM | 27|8|1977

ELVIS PRESLEY, who last Tuesday (August 16) died at the age of 42 in his Memphis home – officially, of a heart attack – was there at the beginning of rock'n'roll and will never be forgotten.

He sustained two generations – in the early stages of his career by the thrilling quality of his black-influenced music, and later on by the personification of rock'n'roll that he came to assume: the King.

He might still not have been so successful were it not for the powerful images of sex he projected. With his swerving pelvis, his "common" good looks and brash clothes, he was as much an affront to staid, '50s America, a time of Nixon and McCarthy, as he was a promise of the liberated good times that developed in the '60s.

Furthermore, the toughness with women and indulgence in clothes, traits that have persisted through the history of rock, were promoted in his songs, in "Hound Dog" and, of course, "Blue Suede Shoes". Thus he gave that new phenomenon, the teenager, a robust identity.

Too soon, however, Presley slowed down, his astonishing potency castrated by his manager, Colonel Tom Parker, who assigned him to second-rate films with soundtracks that were even poorer. And as the quality of his appearances and recordings declined, so did he become more reclusive and remote, until a myth grew up that was to envelop the achievements of The Beatles and other successors.

His stature was always a reference point for rock superstars, even when, in the late 1960s, he returned to performing as virtually a parody of his former self. In a sense, neither Parker nor Presley himself were to blame. Elvis belonged to a different time, when rock'n'rollers were expected to turn into all-round showbiz entertainers after their initial outbursts. It happened with Cliff Richard here, too. Even Jerry Lee Lewis retreated for most of the '60s to country ballads.

Presley had little choice but to become respectable in those early years of the 1960s, when pop as a whole turned platitudinous. It was left to The Rolling Stones to turn rebellion into a way of life – a move that ironically is working against them the older they get and the newer the teenage heroes. Beneath the legend, in any case, was an all-American boy, a slice of patriotic, mom's apple pie. His adolescence may have been spent not far away from Beale St, but he was over religious, with that particular sense of Southern superstition, and it appears he remained so.

The church and the flag. One of his set pieces on stage was always "An American Trilogy", a hymn to the virtues of God's own country which Elvis genuinely seemed to believe in. So now he's gone, and in whatever circumstances few of us will ever really know. Before long the intimate revelations will start to pour forth, and I suppose I'll be as interested as the next man to see what went down. After all, he was a man, not a god – not quite like you and I, but possibly better than if we'd had the same vast fortune.

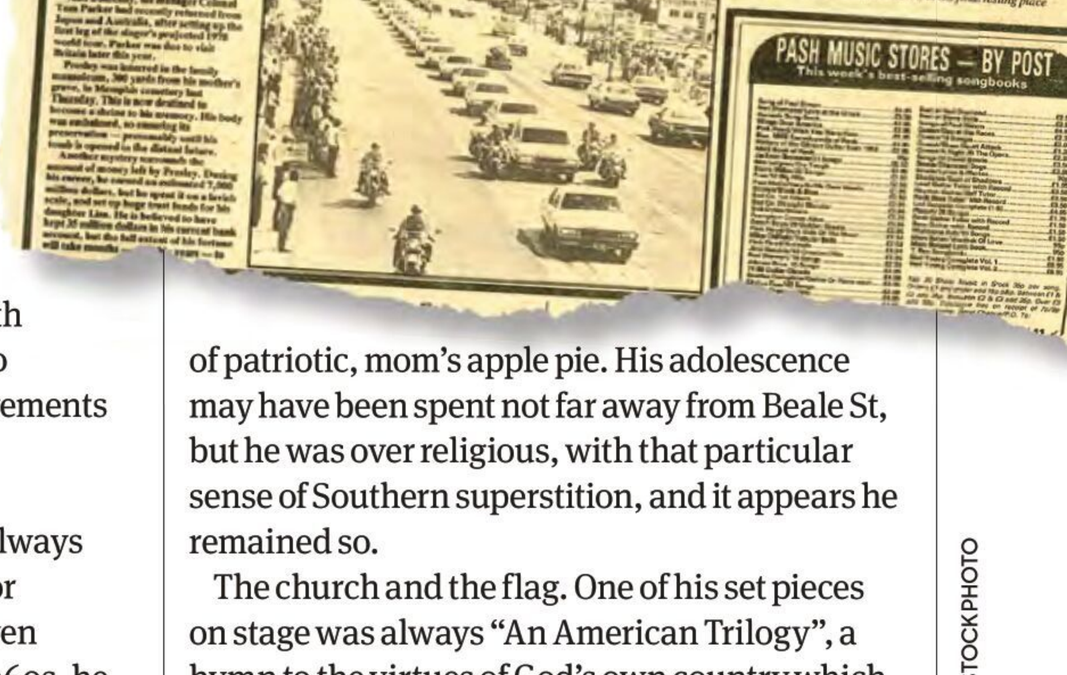
Of all the thousands of words written and said about him this past week, President Carter, his fellow Southerner, has described him best, as "a symbol to people the world over of the vitality, rebelliousness and good humour of this country".

Carter was talking about the old Elvis that contemporary rock fans will now never know. But he did once exist, and even after he became no more than a shadowy presence he continued to reach us with the odd record, the occasional moment in a film.

Now the rock world has shrunk a little. Ladies and gentlemen, Elvis has left the building. For the last time. ***MICHAEL WATTS***

"ELVIS DIED IN FOUR MINUTES AND NO-ONE COULD HAVE SAVED HIM"
Dr Jerry Francisco

1975: Elvis leads a caravan of three-wheelers out of the gates of Graceland


August 27th, 1977

NEW MUSICAL EXPRESS

NEWS DESK

ELVIS' LAST RIDE

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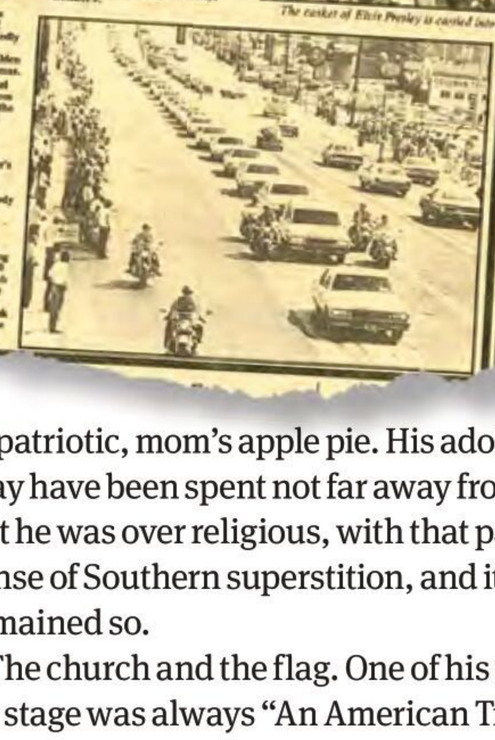
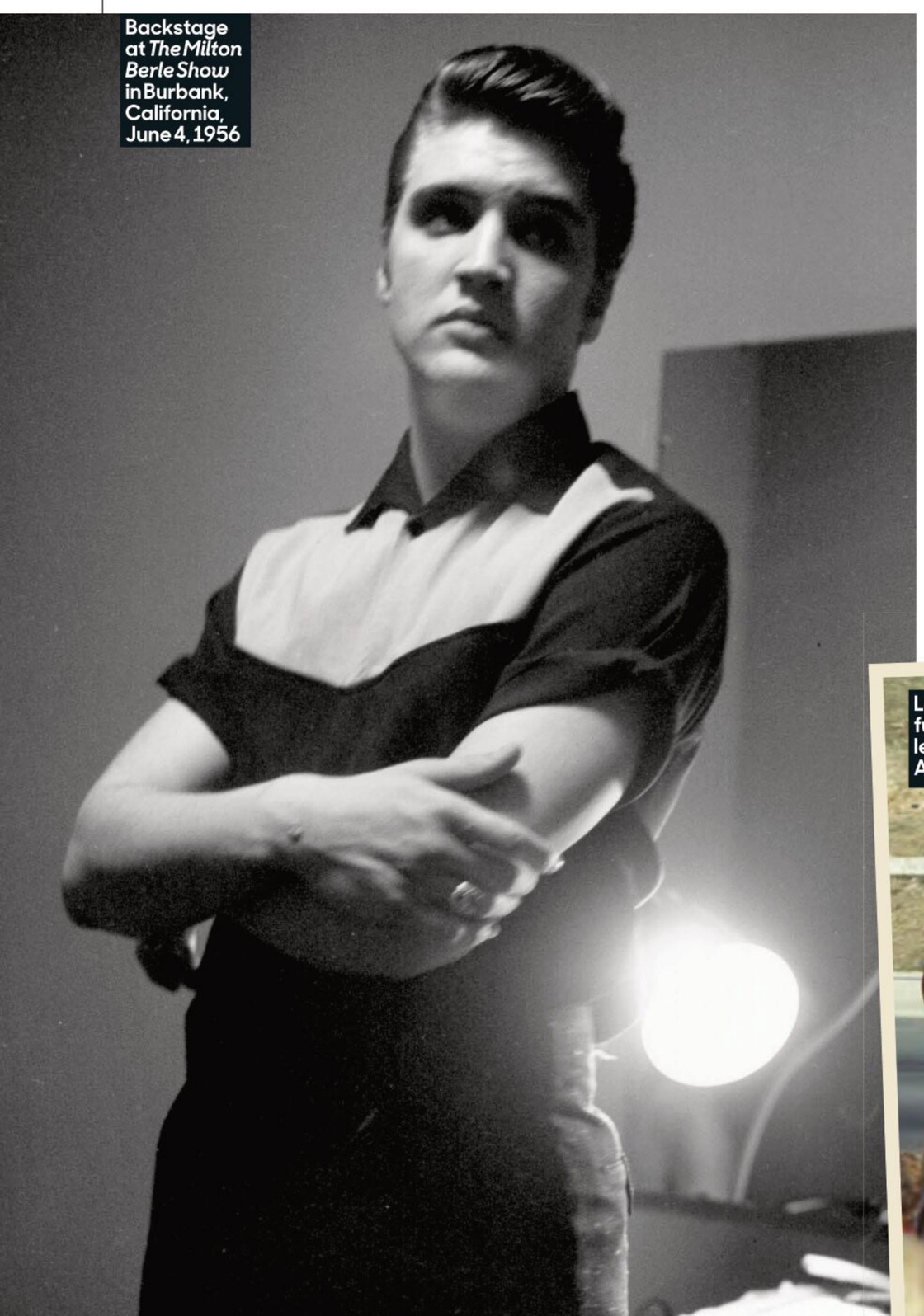
● Back 1 is to Broadcast Elvis Presley's story in 13 parts, introduced by Wish Matchaby and starting on Sunday, October 9.


The casket of Elvis Presley is carried into the family mausoleum at Forest Hill Cemetery in Memphis, past huge banks of flowers completely covering the area.

Left: the funeral cavalcade takes Elvis to his final resting place

PASH MUSIC STORES — BY POST
This week's best-selling songbooks


Backstage at *The Milton Berle Show* in Burbank, California, June 4, 1956

Last respects: the funeral hearse leaving Graceland, August 18, 1977

MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES, ALAIN LEGARSMEUR ELVIS PRESLEY COLLECTION / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

I REMEMBER **ELVIS...**

Stars, friends and associates pay tribute

PHIL SPECTOR: The unquestionable King of Rock'n'Roll. "Can't Help Falling In Love" was my favourite Presley song.

TODD SLAUGHTER, (Secretary, Elvis Fan Club [UK]): It seems so sad that the man who started western youth culture has died. Elvis Presley really was possibly the first and only star to have such a universal following. He has not only been grieved by members of his fan club, but it seems to have touched the whole nation.

They always said that Elvis was the king of rock'n'roll, but in my view this was incorrect. The style of his music has more gospel and country roots than any other music that had been sold to a mass market. It was his charisma and mystery rolled into one that enabled him to reach such an audience. In my view, he will now live forever and ever.

I think he had done all that he intended to do by the end, and everything else was self-promotion. He attempted virtually all styles of music, and apart from touring outside the US he had achieved everything – the only thing left was to show himself off to his public. I think this part of him was self-destructive: for the last years he was on stage virtually every other night, and was planning yet another major tour to start just after he died.

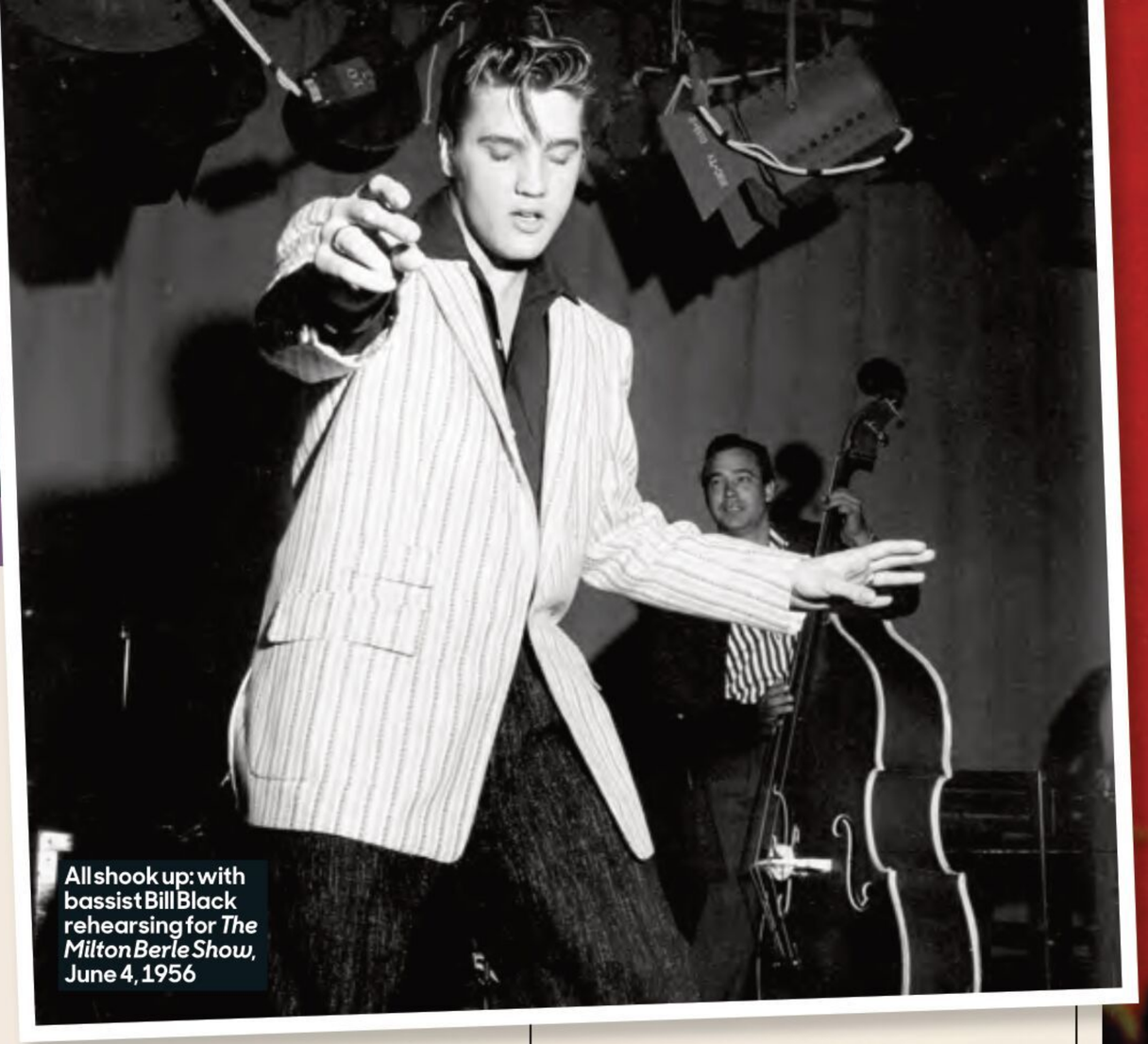
A lot of people are going to make money out of Elvis now that he is dead, just as they did when he was alive. But I don't really feel bitter about that. Many of his fans gave a lot of their lives to following their star, and if they can get something to remember him by, then that is OK.

Personally, I have a last memory of him. The day before he died a letter arrived from Memphis, Tennessee. Inside it was a photograph of Elvis and me taken on my last visit there. It was signed, simply, "Best Wishes, Elvis Presley".

ROY ORBISON: The last time I saw him was in December. He looked really good. He introduced me at his show as one of the greatest singers in the world. I went backstage afterwards and we talked for a couple of hours. We hadn't seen each other in years: he hugged me, we talked about everything – singers, Jerry Lee Lewis, touring. He was a little overweight but looked really good. I'm shocked and can't believe the news. The phone hasn't stopped ringing – I've been doing concerts between phone calls.

> "EVERYONE IN ROCK'N'ROLL, INCLUDING MYSELF, WAS TOUCHED BY HIS SPIRIT"
> *Bryan Ferry*

FREDDY BIENSTOCK (Head of Carlin Music; Elvis's de facto A&R man): I met him right at the beginning, when Colonel Parker found him. All his songs came to me and I would go through them and choose the right ones for him. I always went to the recording studios, and went through all of his movie scores.



All shook up: with bassist Bill Black rehearsing for *The Milton Berle Show*, June 4, 1956

The producers would send me the script and then I would give it to various writing teams. Then the songs would end up published by either Elvis Presley Music or Gladys Music [*"Gladys" was his mother's name*].

Once or twice he wrote his own songs, but they never much came to anything. He would play one to me and go, "Aaargh! I don't like it." But he wrote a couple.

One couldn't say his material was inferior if it sold. There were 200 versions of "Can't Help Falling In Love". "Now Or Never" was covered all over the world. The songs were very carefully chosen, and in the end it was his choice.

No, he didn't give interviews. If he'd given an interview to one person, he would have had to give one to them all. And he was unique in that he had to live an isolated life. He couldn't go out on the streets, so he lived at night. He would hire a bowling rink for two in the morning, things like that.

I think he probably wanted to come to England. I think the Colonel just waited too long. They had rifts between them, but it was like a marriage, and it would've been inconceivable to think of Elvis without Colonel Parker. The Colonel never interfered with music, and Elvis never interfered with business. When he was making the pictures, they of course saw a lot of each other, but recently, no, not that much. By the time Elvis came into town, to do a show, the Colonel would be at the next one.

DICK CLARK (Host, *American Bandstand*): The world has lost a great entertainer and the music industry has lost one of its greatest innovators. The history of music couldn't possibly be written without taking note of Elvis Presley's powerful influence in its development. He was a giant and will be missed by many of us.

PETER GABRIEL: He was the first great rock hero, a great stylist and performer, a good interpreter of songs, and seemed to have an effortless presence. But rock isn't a situation where heroes are allowed to grow old gracefully. Part of the blame lies with the business for treating its legends as commodities instead of human beings. He had a lot to live up to, and was surrounded by flatterers who would cater for all his excesses. He became so commercially powerful he was probably rarely criticised. It must have been very hard for him to be surrounded by people who expected him to live up to his manufactured image instead of accepting him for his real identity. I never saw Elvis live, and for me The Beatles were the most exciting thing, as a teenager. Elvis seemed more for the older generation, but I could see he had something as a performer, and he had an animal magic.

I enjoyed *Jailhouse Rock*, but his later movies were totally soulless. In a lot of ways he was exploited to a point where he couldn't handle it any more. We heard all these stories about him locked away in his house playing rows of jukeboxes. But he was symbolic of the American dream, part of the music mythology, and he represented what a lot of people wanted to be. It must have been a shock to many to realise fame and riches didn't produce happiness.

It takes a casualty to remind people of that. A lot of people have that objective, but there is a certain point where fame and fortune crosses over into fairyland and it is hard to get back to reality.

PAT BOONE: Elvis was truly the King. A lot of us wondered what an

Rubber legs a-go-go: Elvis in his hometown of Tupelo, Mississippi, September 26, 1956

MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

Back to Burbank: Elvis films his TV comeback special, June 27, 1968

old Elvis would be like. Now we will never know.

BRYAN FERRY: Everyone in rock'n'roll, including myself, was touched by his spirit. I was, and always will be, a fan.

BUNNY LEWIS [agent]: I approached Col Parker's aide some 12 years ago about the possibility of Elvis coming to Britain, but I knew it was hopeless. He hated flying, and we wouldn't have been able to offer enough money, anyway. Elvis was very jocular, friendly. Even at that time he had a weight problem, but not the sort of thing he had lately. Nevertheless, he looked very smart. This was one rock'n'roller who didn't look a scruff – anything but a scruff.

Jim Smith, his cousin, was with him all the time. He had to be on all sessions, too. He was like a lucky mascot. Then there were another half dozen who all had odd jobs. Basically, they were all quite pleasant yobbos. I met the chimpanzee Elvis kept as a pet. I found it while I was wandering around the house. I went downstairs into a kind of cellar and there, tied onto a chain, was this monkey. And it was pathetically friendly. It went mad when I went down. It was looking for company.

I asked why he kept it. Everyone said, "Elvis loves animals." Apparently, at Graceland, he was surrounded by donkeys and geese – you name it. It was a genuine liking for animals in a completely naive, undisciplined way. I couldn't understand anyone who loved animals keeping this ape chained up down there on its own all day.

Elvis was a simple chap. He couldn't bear a sophisticated woman. He couldn't bear a woman with a hat. He told me that. He didn't like women who were terribly made up, or terribly chic. To him, the outward, visible sign of a chic woman was a hat. The one time I saw him really impose himself, was in the recording studio. When he went in there he said what he wanted; and he got it.

JOHN CALE: I thought Elvis died when I recorded "Heartbreak Hotel".

THE CLASH: No Elvis, Beatles or Rolling Stones in 1977.

Cliff Richard: If there'd been no Elvis, there would be no Cliff Richard, as Elvis was responsible for paving the way for people like us who wanted to express themselves musically. I'm stunned by his death. It's a great loss for everyone.

PERRY COMO: The gentle boy Elvis became an angry and frustrated man because of his stardom. I don't think he lived two years as himself. At first he was happy about success, but as the years wore on a sadness crept in because Elvis was unable to do the things he wanted to.

DEL SHANNON: A few years ago Elvis flew me to see one of his shows in Las Vegas. He was doing "Runaway" in his set and arranged for a front row table and introduced me in the audience. After the stage show we talked for about three hours, a lot about country music. We were both country music lovers. We talked a lot about Jerry Lee Lewis and Faron Young. I remember talking to Elvis and telling him, "You have to go over to England and Europe and tour. You owe it to the fans. You have to go." I told him I go over once a year and meet a lot of people and fans, who tell me they're upset that Elvis never toured. And he said, "I'd love to, but if I go to England I have to go to France, Germany and all the other countries." Something seemed to be a little weird. I know he would have done every country for free.

IAN HUNTER: There's no argument about it – he was fantastic. I used to love his slower songs, the ballads. It seemed the last 10 years he didn't concentrate as much on rock'n'roll and veered more into cabaret. The thing is, he'll be missed. He had a tremendous voice. I loved watching early live concert films. Elvis had animal magnetism. He was even sexy to guys; I can't imagine what the chicks used to think.

JOHNNY ROTTEN: It's unbelievable. I don't believe it's true. But in a way I don't really feel that it has anything to do with me. Really, he came to represent everything we're trying to react against. I never wanted to become like Elvis, not through financial greed, anyway, I don't want to become a fat, rich, sick, reclusive rock star. I want to continue as I've always done. I don't want to die. Elvis was dead before he died, and his gut was so big it cast a shadow over rock'n'roll in the last few years. Our music is what's important now.

TOM PETTY: I met Elvis when I was 11 years old, when my uncle was working on one of his movie sets in Florida. He was always The Man. His influence will never go away. I grew up on a box of Elvis's singles a year before The Beatles came out. What makes me angry was the situation around him. Along the line he was turned into a commodity. He was the greatest. I could never see him in concert the last few years when he resumed live action. I lived and breathed the dude for years to the point that people thought I was strange. I saw all his movies – they were embarrassing but I saw them all. I learned music completely from Elvis records. Coming from the South, I always felt that I related a little bit more to him than everyone else. The day he died I woke up here in Los Angeles, the sky was overcast, and it was raining in August – in Los Angeles the temperature is 85 degrees. There was even a small earthquake in Santa Monica. I haven't left the house since.

MARC BOLAN: It's the most tragic thing that could have happened to people of our era. But he has been ill for so long, perhaps it was the best thing. I was very moved by his death, and he was the greatest living pop idol in the whole world. I hope he rests in peace now that he has gone to the great jukebox in the sky. I hope they've got all his records.

The King is dead: Elvis's funeral cortege makes it way to Forest Hill Cemetery, August 18, 1977

MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES; BRADELTERMAN/FILMMAGIC; BETTMANN/GETTY IMAGES

“Young people want the originals”

In 2017, *Uncut* investigates how Elvis’s reputation is holding up, 40 years since his death. Elvis was a man who feared being forgotten by his fans, even as early as 1958, but the years since have brought reputational ups as well as downs. “This man left the world too early,” one expert tells Stephen Deusner, “he still had more to give.”

MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

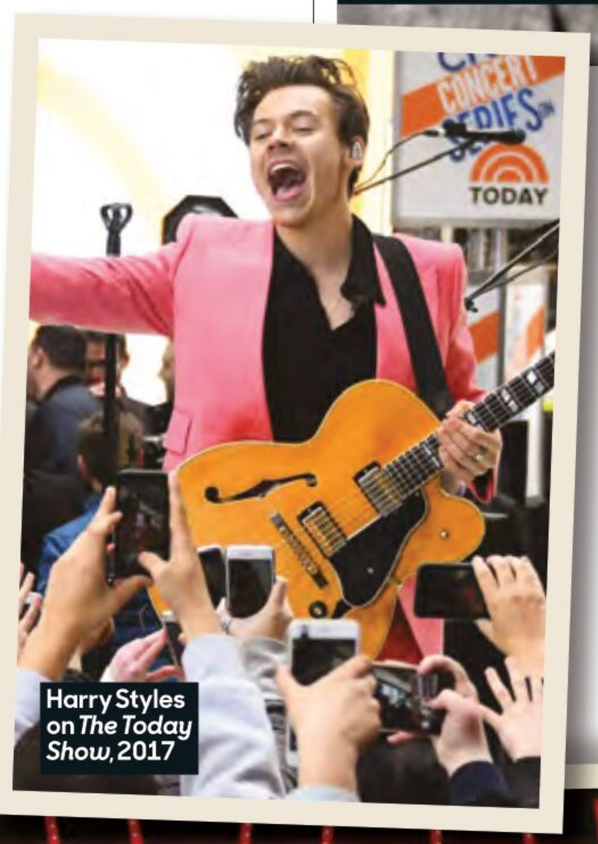
In the pink: Elvis in 1956

WHEN Shawn Klush was in LA filming episodes of Martin Scorsese's HBO series *Vinyl*, he made a pilgrimage to 1174 Hillcrest Drive in Beverly Hills, where Elvis Presley once lived. It's a sprawling, L-shaped house, a mash-up of modern and French Regency styles, built in 1957 and set low on the hill for privacy, with a geometrically complex swimming pool in the backyard and a clear view of the city below. Among the three houses he owned in California – another in Beverly Hills and one in Palm Springs – it was Elvis's favourite, and he would often greet fans at the gate, shaking hands and signing autographs, occasionally even practising karate moves.

For Klush, it was both a personal and a professional journey. In addition to being an enormous fan of Elvis, he is the world's most accomplished impersonator – not merely a tribute act, but an artist in his own right. Originally from Pittston in north-west Pennsylvania, he can't exactly remember how he got into the business, but says he just woke up one day in front of a crowd, clad in a rhinestone-crusted jumpsuit and belting "Burning Love". Since then he has toured with some of Elvis's original backing band, including members of the Stamps and the Inspirations. In 2013, he was voted World's Greatest Elvis by BBC viewers and was named the Ultimate Elvis Tribute Artist by Elvis Presley Enterprises in Memphis. He has channelled the King's spirit and sung his songs all over the world, including sold-out shows at the 15,000-seat Movistar Arena in Santiago, Chile.

And yet, as close to Presley as Klush may be, visiting that Hillcrest home was overwhelming. He did not go into the house; like every other fan, he just stood at the gates looking into the property and imaging the man himself coming out to greet him. And then he went back downtown to play Elvis for HBO, a performance that earned him rave reviews.

Autograph me: Elvis with fans at North Little Rock, Arkansas, March 1958



Harry Styles on *The Today Show*, 2017

"When you go through Graceland, it's the weirdest vibe you're ever going to feel in your life," says Klush. "It's almost like touching royalty. When I drove up to his house on Hillcrest, I got the exact feeling as I did when I was in Graceland. That told me right there something about his charisma. It could be the bubblegummiest music ever or it could be one of the dumbest movies, but you'll listen to it again and again because he recorded it. There's something mesmerising about it."

That's why we're still talking about Elvis on the 40th anniversary of his death. His charisma lingers, not only in songs like "Good Rockin' Tonight" and "Suspicious Minds", but also in the assembly-line films he made, disposable fare that nevertheless feature Presley giving loose, comfortable, often comic performances, with a magnetism so natural many critics took it for not acting at all. He's become an oddball figure in contemporary pop culture. In May, Harry Styles sported a pink-and-black suit when he performed on *The Today Show*, a knowing homage to one of his formative influences. The former One Direction star says that Presley's 1960 version of "The Girl Of My Best Friend" was the first song he ever learned.

The Royal Philharmonic Orchestra is even touring an Elvis show, based on a pair of albums featuring new symphonic arrangements over archival Elvis vocals; 2016's *The Wonder Of You* debuted at No 1 in the UK. More recently, Michael Eavis (born the same year as Elvis) kicked off this year's Glastonbury by leading the crowd in a spirited karaoke singalong of "Always On My Mind". In addition to that bit part on *Vinyl*, Elvis has been a recurring role on CMT's Sun Records, played by 18-year-old tribute artist Drake Milligan.

Especially at Graceland, Elvis is still big business. Welcoming hundreds of thousands of visitors each year, his home remains largely how he left it, complete with shag carpet and Jungle

Shawn Klush winning The Ultimate Elvis Tribute Artist Contest in Memphis, August 17, 2007

BETTMANN/GETTY IMAGES;STAN HONDA/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES;MIKE COPPOLA/GETTY IMAGES

Room décor. Across Elvis Presley Boulevard, however, Elvis Presley Enterprises Inc recently completed a $45 million renovation that includes a 450-room hotel. A new, 200,000-square-foot entertainment complex houses a museum devoted to his life, another featuring his extensive fleet of cars, and space for rotating exhibitions. Elvis, it seems, is everywhere.

Or is he? Does that star quality translate 60 years after his rise? Fifty years after his comeback? Forty years after his death? Reports of his waning popularity are nothing new, but have grown more intense as the anniversary of his death affords a fresh opportunity to assess his legacy. A recent YouGov poll, admittedly not the most scientific undertaking, had alarming news for Elvis fans. Of the 2,000 Britons questioned, 29 per cent of listeners aged 18–24 had never listened to an Elvis song. Only 12 per cent said they actually liked Elvis. That puts him far below The Beatles, David Bowie and Michael Jackson. Similarly, recent reports by *The Guardian* and *The Observer* have pondered the King's fading popularity, citing millennial indifference and shuttered memorabilia shops to support their claims of diminished relevance. He's a singles artist in a market ruled by albums, a figure so close to black blues, R&B and gospel that he's routinely accused of cultural appropriation. The controversies surrounding him – the hip swivels and pelvic thrusts, in particular – are so far in the past that they seem quaint. It can be difficult to gauge his popularity. Does the charisma still cling?

"Are you kidding me?" says Klush. "I just did 10 cities in England, sold out five-, six-, seven-thousand seats a night. I don't know where they're getting their information, as that's not what I'm seeing every night."

Klush has become, for many fans, both a surrogate and a celebrity in his own right, a stand-in for Elvis thanks to his jet-black hair and outsize sideburns. "When you're in front of the public eye, you don't have a private life. When we were in London, I went to see Big Ben and I don't even remember seeing it. Everybody knew we were there." He is as close to Elvis as you can get in 2017 without a Ouija board or holograms. He's actual flesh and blood, rhinestones and sweat. "If I'm going through all this, what did Elvis go through?"

"IF I'M GOING THROUGH ALL THIS, WHAT DID ELVIS GO THROUGH?"
Shawn Klush

ONE thing Elvis did go through was grappling with an intense fear of being forgotten, of not leaving a deep enough mark on the world – a worry that has roots in the earliest stages of his career. It may have driven him to Sun Records in the first place, where he paid to cut a song for his mother called "My Happiness". The desire to preserve something of himself compelled him back to Sun to audition repeatedly for Sam Phillips, who not only recorded the boy, but helped make him a star. Almost immediately, Elvis began touring throughout the mid-South, along with the friendly competition of Carl Perkins, Jerry Lee Lewis, Johnny Cash and others in the Sun stable.

"We all toured together," recalls WS "Fluke" Holland, who played drums for Perkins and later for Cash. "I have a poster from a show we played in 1956 at the National Guard Armory in Amory, Mississippi, and I remember that show. Carl would do an old song by The Platters, 'Only You', and the people would have a fit. As we were walking out the door, we walked by Elvis, and he looked up at Sun's booking agent Bob Neal and said, 'Bob, don't ever book me on another show with those Perkins boys!' He was just kidding, but it's funny how it worked out. He became such a big star after that, that we never did work another show together."

Elvis's success became too unwieldy for an independent label like Sun, and in 1955 Phillips sold Presley's contract to RCA Victor for what many now view as a shockingly low sum. Hits like "Heartbreak Hotel" and "Hound Dog" eclipsed his Sun singles, and Elvis eventually broke into the movies, first as a doomed cowboy in 1956's *Love Me Tender*. His performance might have drawn pans from critics, but he quickly became as big at the box office as he was on the pop charts. Yet, like so many reasonable young men his age, Elvis dreaded the draft. America was not at war, but Cold War tensions were

WS HOLLAND REMEMBERS THE MILLION DOLLAR QUARTET

How the stars aligned one day at Sun Studios

A KID from Saltillo, Tennessee, with no musical ambitions whatsoever, WS "Fluke" Holland was roped into playing the drums by his friend Carl Perkins. In 1956, he borrowed a drum set from a friend, piled Perkins and his band into his huge Cadillac, and headed to Sun Records in Memphis, where the band cut "Blue Suede Shoes". A few months on, he played drums for a jam session between Perkins, Elvis Presley, Jerry Lee Lewis, and Johnny Cash – now known as the Million Dollar Quartet.

"After 'Blue Suede Shoes' was such a big hit," Holland recalls, "Sam Phillips had us back in December of 1956 for us to record a new song. That was 'Matchbox'. Sam had hired Jerry Lee Lewis to play piano with us. But we didn't have any idea that Johnny Cash and Elvis were going to be in town recording. They dropped by Sun, and everything just stopped. They all started singing and having a jam session.

"Jack Clement was the engineer and he didn't think anything about it when those boys dropped in. He decided he was going to go next door to the Taylor Café and get him a sandwich, and he left the big reel-to-reel machines running. If he hadn't done that, you would never have heard those sessions. We'd have jammed for a bit and then said, 'Hey, good to see you,' and that would have been it.

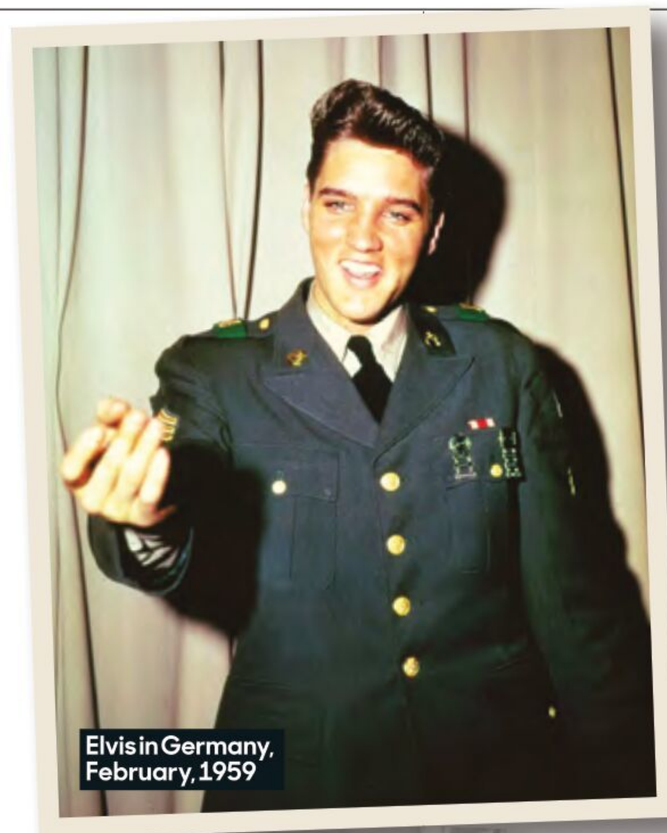
"We all thought it was just another session for Carl Perkins and his brothers. There was no million dollars, nothing, no big stars. Sam did think to have a photographer come out and take their picture, and I told him one day, 'Sam, if you'd have been half as smart as people think you are, you'd have had that photographer pan over about three feet. Then I would have been in the picture and it would have been multi-million!'"

MATTHEW SIMMONS/GETTY IMAGES

"ELVIS SAID 'THANK YOU VERY MUCH' BECAUSE HE SINCERELY BELIEVED IN EXPRESSING HIS GRATITUDE"

Shawn Klush

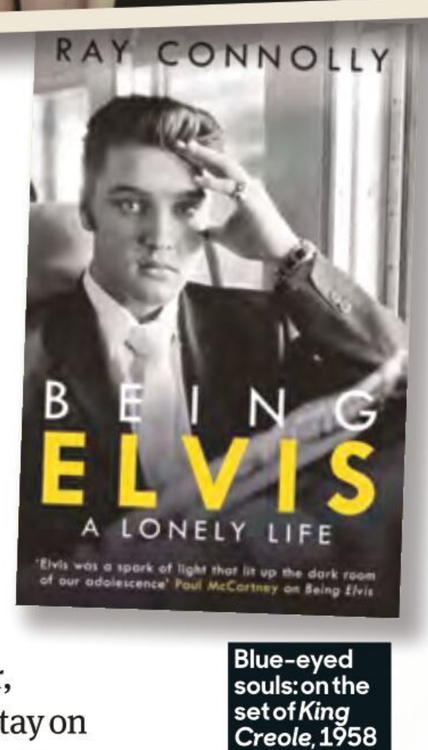
escalating. Enlisting would involve basic training and most likely an overseas assignment, along with an even worse fate: while he may already have felt suffocated by celebrity, he was not prepared to trade the glamour in for the Army greens, to sacrifice his pompadour to the military barber, to take such a hefty pay cut from $200,000 a month to $78 a week.



Elvis in Germany, February, 1959

But a deeper fear churned within Elvis, and he fought not to show his concern in public. Elvis did not want to be forgotten. He confided to his coterie of friends and hangers-on that his career was surely finished; his fans would forget him, and he would be displaced from radio playlists and pop charts by younger, hipper artists who could tour, record, give interviews and stay on top of the latest trends and fashions. Elvis had no idea how or if he would be remembered, and he feared he would go back to driving a truck. To make matters worse, Colonel Tom Parker, who never achieved any military rank and who saw enough of a marketing opportunity that he sold Elvis dog tags, banned him from performing, even in Army talent shows.

After receiving an extension to film one more movie, *King Creole*, Elvis enlisted on March 24, 1958, dubbed "Black Monday" by fans. Private Presley US53310761 reported to basic training at Fort Hood, Texas, where he learnt, among other things, to drive a tank.



Before accepting an assignment to the 3rd Armored Division in Friedberg, Germany, two important things happened. First, he did one more recording session, still dressed in his Army greens, laying down a handful of tracks to be released as singles during his absence. Second, his beloved mother died of heart failure brought on by hepatitis and cirrhosis of the liver. The dutiful son was crushed.

ELVIS didn't need to worry about being forgotten – at least not yet. During his two years in the Army, he never saw combat, but he did grow increasingly dependent on amphetamines, which he insisted had no side-effects. He met a 14-year-old Priscilla Beaulieu, whom he would groom to be his wife. Back in the US, his popularity barely dimmed. *King Creole* was a huge box office hit, and "A Fool Such As I" and "A Big Hunk O' Love", both recorded after basic training, had sold well and helped keep his name in the papers.

He returned a hero. However, as Ray Connolly recalls in his new biography, *Being Elvis: A Lonely Life*, "After two years in the Army, his ambition burned as brightly as ever, but now some of the wonder and romance of youth was gone. There was a more brittle, impatient, even arrogant edge to him."

John Lennon once declared that Elvis really died when he joined the Army, but presumably the former Beatle hadn't yet heard "Suspicious Minds". It wasn't a death, but the first in an endless series of rebirths. He would return a box office draw, declawed and dull in countless cinema cheapies; by the end of the '60s he had re-reinvented himself as a commanding live performer, prowling the stage during his '68 Comeback Special on NBC. Ten years later, a new version of Elvis would emerge: the rock'n'roll casualty, bloated, unhealthy, his body distorted, but his voice intact until he died in August 1977. Death did nothing to settle such transformations, as Mondo Elvis replicated itself endlessly into an army of impersonators, each exaggerating the man in different ways. He inspired a cult-like fervour, the faithful making pilgrimages to Graceland to celebrate his birth or commemorate his death. Tabloids claimed he had risen from the grave or maybe had never actually died.

As a rock star Elvis Presley was a malleable

Blue-eyed souls: on the set of *King Creole*, 1958

Biggest fan: Priscilla Beaulieu, circa 1959

BETTMANN/GETTY IMAGES; MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES; SUNSET BOULEVARD/CORBIS VIA GETTY IMAGES

The Presley family graves at Graceland, Memphis

entity, one that could change and adapt to new trends and teen movements. Along the way he shed relics like a secular saint: not just singles and LPs, but concert posters, tour books, teddy bears, sunglasses, locks of hair, vials of sweat, soiled underwear, even the Cadillacs he gave away to friends and strangers – each of which allowed fans in the pre-digital world to feel like they owned a piece of the King. Elvis became endlessly reproducible and repackagable, to the extent that we understand him today primarily through stuff.

Some of that stuff has become all too easy to ridicule, especially later in his career, when Elvis sported big sunglasses, wore elaborate jumpsuits, drove fancier cars, and maintained an unhealthy diet. As a tribute act, Klush rejects the easy jokes made at Elvis's expense, which means watching his wardrobe as well as his mouth. "I'm not going to walk around saying 'Thankyouverymuch'. That always bothered me. The man said 'Thank you very much' because he sincerely believed in expressing his gratitude. And he ate peanut-butter-and-banana sandwiches because he grew up poor. The only thing Gladys had in the house was peanut butter and a couple of pieces of bread and butter. So she did what any mother would do to feed her child. She made him a sandwich. But that's become such a joke, such a cliché."

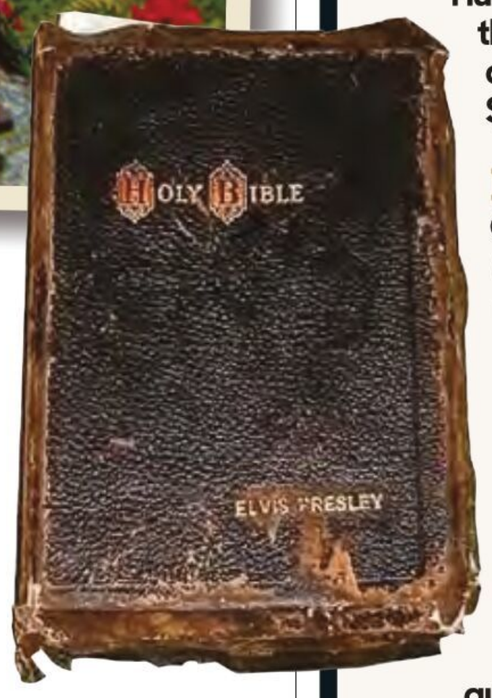
NO other rock star has that kind of material footprint, but that makes Elvis a cumbersome figure, hard to pin down and therefore potentially difficult to sell to new generations of listeners. It also means the market for all that stuff can be extremely volatile, and few know that as much as Jerry Osborne, who has made Elvis ephemera his business since the 1970s. A former radio DJ and a long-time newspaper columnist, he runs a publishing company that specialises in memorabilia catalogues, including the popular Presleyana series, updated every five years with prices for thousands of pieces of Presley artefacts: concerts posters, tour books, teddy bears, library cards, magazines. The eighth edition is out in August, and it points to some interesting developments in the market for Elvis memorabilia. "In the last five years, original first and second pressings that would have come out in the '50s and '60s have dropped considerably," says Osborne. "But reissues and repressings that were done in the '70s and '80s are now in some cases worth more than the originals. That flies in the face of all we've ever thought about collectables."

The reason for that strange trend, he says, may be less musical than mathematical. "First of all, the reissues were done in much smaller quantities, and they were purchased by far fewer people. The reprints don't sell very well, so by virtue of how many were pressed, they have become much rarer than the originals, which sold millions of copies. How rare is an album from 1956 or '57? Not very, because they sold so many." Mint copies – pristine, virtually unplayed – can still fetch thousands of dollars, but even slightly used copies are so common as to be uncollectable. That trend cannot continue, says John Tefteller, a rare-record dealer based in Oregon and a contributor to the Presleyana series. "There are completists on artists like Elvis and The Beatles, and they buy every single reissue, as they want to have every single release by that artist," he explains. "That kind of thinking didn't start until the '70s, so they had to go back and pick up reissues from the '60s. So it's a completely artificial market. The future is what the young people will be buying, not the older, hardcore collectors. The young people are going to revert back to the normal marketplace. They're going to want the originals."

As older collectors die off and the market contorts to accommodate a new generation, those prices may go down, but there is still interest in these collectables and relics. People still want some piece of Elvis, if only as a talisman of remembrance. Elvis didn't want to be forgotten, and his fans don't want his memory to diminish either. Some collect items he touched; others re-create the music and the attitude onstage. Says Klush, "It's all because of this man who left the world too early, who still had more to give, who would still be giving more and more if he were alive today. I'm hell-bent on people remembering who this man was."

FIVE WEIRD PRESLEYANA RELICS

From dental work to underpants, fans have paid top dollar for a piece of the King



A library card

In 1948, the teenaged Elvis checked out a biography of Andrew Jackson from the Humes High School Library. In 2013, the card, bearing his earliest known autograph, sold at auction for $7,500.

Elvis's Bible

Given to him for his first Christmas at Graceland in 1957, this Bible (left) may be worn and frayed, but it still managed to fetch nearly $100,000 at auction in 2012.

The King's crown

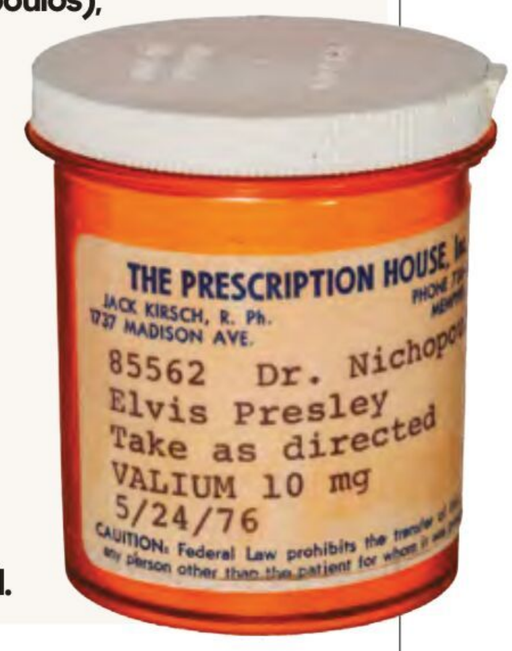
In 1975 Presley broke a crown on his molar, which his girlfriend saved for posterity. Thirty years later, the dental work went up for auction on eBay, although it was quickly taken down for violating the site's policy of not selling human teeth.

An empty Valium bottle

This grim totem of Presley's addiction to over-the-counter medication, mostly prescribed by the infamous Dr Nick (aka George Nichopoulos), sold for $6,500 in 2015 (inset right).

Elvis's dirty laundry

Reportedly worn by Elvis during a show in 1977, shortly before he died, his pair of baby-blue briefs, still stained and sweaty, went up for auction in 2012, but did not sell.



JAN BUTCHOFSKY/CORBIS VIA GETTY IMAGES

“I wanted to find out everything”

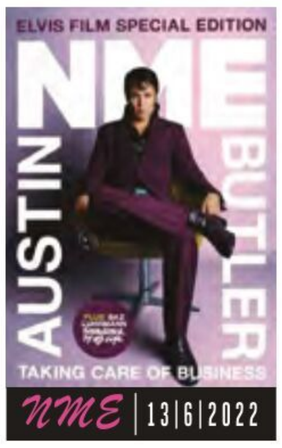
AUSTIN BUTLER, the lead in Baz Luhrmann’s 2022 movie *Elvis* tells all to **NME** about his big break. How to succeed without becoming yet another impersonator? Answer: by going deep. “His spirituality changes. His relationships. The way he moves,” he explains. “I would have to break each one of those things down.”

Would-be king: Austin Butler in Baz Luhrmann's *Elvis*

Early days: Butler's Elvis in the first flush of fame

Butler as Elvis opposite Tom Hanks' Colonel Tom Parker

World of leather: the '68 comeback special recreated



THE first time Austin Butler took to the stage as Elvis Presley was one of the most nerve-wracking moments of his life. "I was walking out in the famous black leather outfit and I was terrified," says Butler, who exudes the kind of laidback California cool that makes it hard to imagine he's ever been nervous. "I'd done so much work, but in that moment I thought, 'If this doesn't go well the whole film could fall apart and my career's over. It's make or break.'"

Hundreds of extras were waiting for him to perform and excite them into a screaming frenzy. The scene was a recreation of Elvis's 1968 special, his 'comeback' show after seven years away from the live stage focusing on making movies. It was one of the defining moments of Elvis's career, a show that proved he was still the most exciting performer on the planet. Standing on the edge of set, looking out at the bright lights and expectant audience, Butler took a huge breath. "Then I realised, this is a moment that was make or break for Elvis too. Everything was on the line for him." If this show didn't go right for Elvis, his career was over.

"I remember this thing he once said: 'I have this fear that I'm going to go out there and they're going to throw rocks at me.' Then he'd go out there and after one or two songs the nerves went away."

Butler strutted out and launched into his first song, "Heartbreak Hotel". The audience screamed in genuine thrill. "Elvis was right."

Austin Butler has become well practised at embracing terrifying experiences. Playing Elvis Presley in Baz Luhrmann's epic biopic has launched Butler, 30, into the spotlight, the star of one of the biggest films of 2022. It's a huge, incredibly challenging role to play. Luhrmann's film follows Elvis from his teenage years – as a newcomer who shook up the music industry and terrified the establishment – to a global sensation who couldn't quite understand his own success, to a troubled man who died at just 42. Butler plays them all.

It's a role that's consumed the actor's life for almost three years, through an intense audition process that saw him beat a crowded field to the role of a lifetime, to a shoot that put him toe-to-toe with Oscar winner Tom Hanks, who plays Colonel Tom Parker, the man who discovered Elvis and ruthlessly exploited him. Butler calls becoming Presley his "obsession". "I cannot quantify the amount of hours I spent on every aspect of this," he says, with an enormous smile.

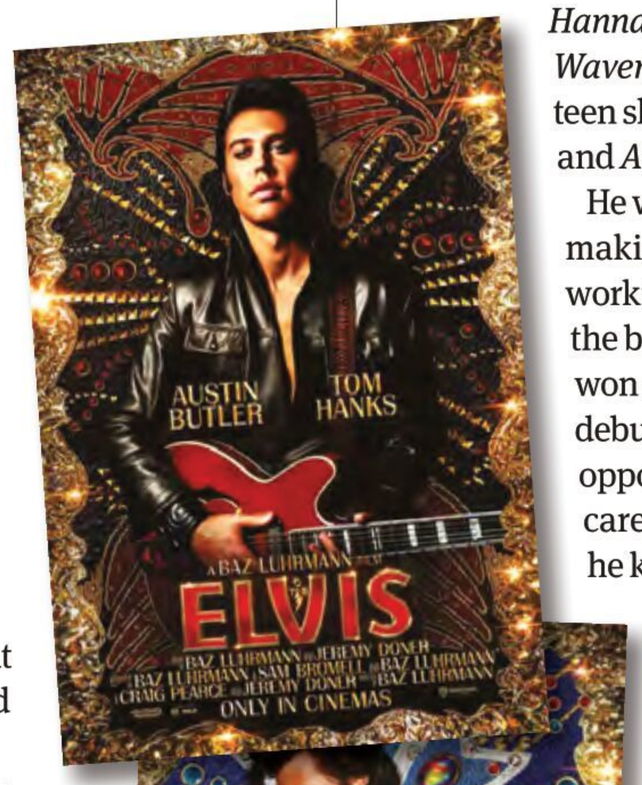
When Baz Luhrmann, the Oscar nominated director of *Moulin Rouge!*, *Romeo + Juliet* and *The Great Gatsby*, decided that his first film in almost 10 years would tell the story of Elvis Presley's incredible life, he began a hunt for the perfect actor who could encompass everything about Elvis.

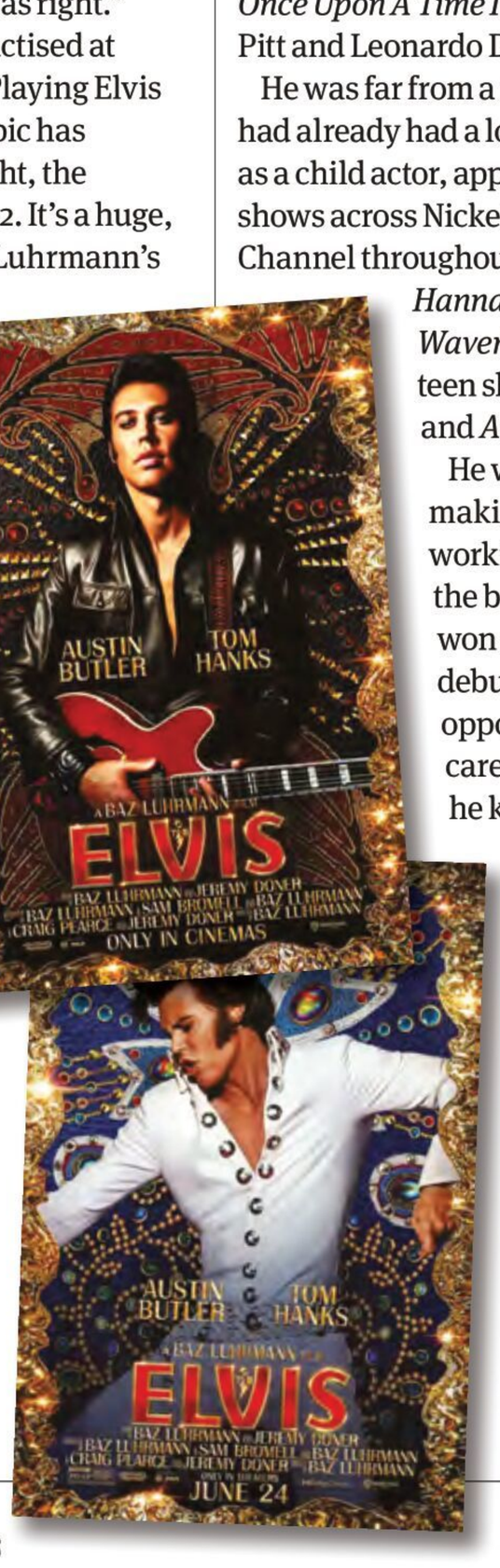
It would need someone who could dazzle audiences in the film's astonishing concert scenes, but also convey the private pain and insecurity inside Elvis. It wouldn't be enough to simply look or sound like him. He needed someone who could become him. In early 2019, Luhrmann cast his net wide, auditioning Hollywood stars and newcomers alike. At the time, Butler was fresh off a supporting role in Quentin Tarantino's *Once Upon A Time In Hollywood*, alongside Brad Pitt and Leonardo DiCaprio.

He was far from a newcomer to acting. Butler had already had a long and successful career as a child actor, appearing in a large number of shows across Nickelodeon and the Disney Channel throughout the 2000s, including *Hannah Montana* and *Wizards Of Waverly Place*, then transitioning to teen shows like *The Carrie Diaries* and *Arrow*.

He was now quietly and diligently making the move into adult roles, working to prove himself alongside the best in the business. In 2018, he won rave reviews for his Broadway debut in *The Iceman Cometh*, opposite Denzel Washington. His career was progressing well but he knew that winning a role like Elvis was a long shot.

"I sent in this tape of me singing 'Unchained Melody'," says Butler. Where many actors might be tempted to record a barnstorming show to demonstrate they could match the superstar performer, Butler recorded a stripped-back performance, just him and a piano. Luhrmann had found his guy. Not that Butler knew that yet.





"Baz doesn't audition in a conventional way. He doesn't do many things in a conventional way," he laughs. "I flew to New York and spoke to Baz for about three hours. He asked me to come back the next day and read the script with him. So I came in and read some scenes, then he asked me to come back the next day and sing a couple of songs. We did that day after day for about five months and I didn't know if I had the job yet."

Those five months of work proved to be invaluable when Butler finally learned he had the part, in July 2019. "We already had all those months of exploring this together and asking all the questions about what we thought was possible. And I had all that time to ask myself the question of whether it was possible." Butler threw himself into preparation, but it was actually a journey that started decades before.

BUTLER grew up in Anaheim, California, which is where he was first introduced to Elvis. "My grandmother loved Elvis," he remembers. "I remember she would always have Elvis films on in the house. Both my grandmothers loved Elvis, in fact. The other one would have a lot of his '50s music playing, because that was when she was in high school." Elvis was part of the soundtrack of his earliest days, but he hadn't given much thought to the man behind the icon. "I didn't know much about his personal life. I didn't know much about how he grew up. I wanted to find out everything I could."

Today, Butler looks very different from Elvis. His hair, which was dyed a deep brown and slicked back for filming, is back to its natural blond,

Costume drama: a colourfully reborn Elvis shakes his hips in Luhrmann's vibrantly hued biopic

scruffily held in place with sunglasses on top of his head. He looks tanned and relaxed. But in his voice there is still a trace of Elvis's Mississippi twang, his vowels long and his speaking pace unhurried. It's a mark of how deeply he embedded himself in the process.

Even when shooting was paused during the pandemic, Butler remained on location in Australia and continued exploring who Elvis was, watching every interview he could, reading every book, and minutely examining every track. Playing any real-life person is tricky but there's something especially tough about Elvis. He's one of the most impersonated celebrities in history. There are so many Elvis impersonators in the world there's even a world record for the most Elvis impersonators in one building (895, set in 2014, since you ask). Butler needed to learn how to be Elvis without looking like he was just another impersonator.

"We're talking about finding the depth of a human being. I had to break it into pieces," he says. "I would spend hours of the day just working on finding his voice. That was finding how his voice changed over years – it changed a lot from where the film starts, in '54/55, to '77. His spirituality changes. His relationships. The way he moves. I would have to break each one of those things down."

He dug and dug, always looking to unearth more secrets about his subject. "I'd hear a vocal mannerism and become obsessed with it. I'd listen to it 1,000 times and record it and work until I sounded the same." He even learned karate, because Elvis learned karate. "I was all about 'how do I become identical and not just a copy. How do I let his soul meet my soul?'"

Audiences will see the results of Butler's immense commitment when Elvis arrives in cinemas. For Butler, it will be the culmination of three of the most challenging and rewarding years of his life. "It just is truly the most immense privilege," says Butler of the experience.

"Getting to collaborate with Baz and Tom and Olivia [*DeJonge, who plays Priscilla*] and... be part of Elvis's legacy, it's so special. Being at this place in my career where I'm able to work with other artists, actors and directors that I've admired for so long and get to make stories that really excite me, I just feel blessed."

And if he has any nerves about his big moment, he doesn't show them. Because that's not what Elvis would do. He'd just get out there and give the people a show, get them all shook up.

"IT WAS ABOUT 'HOW DO I BECOME IDENTICAL? HOW DO I LET HIS SOUL MEET MY SOUL?'"
Austin Butler

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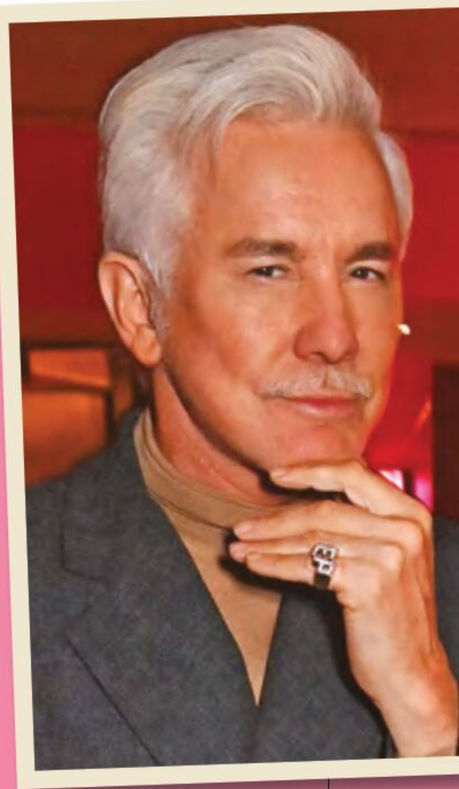
BAZ LUHRMANN
The Soundtrack Of My Life

A little conversation with the *Elvis* director about his favourite music



The song that changed my life
DAVID BOWIE – CHANGES
"From the moment I first heard this song, I was a huge Bowie fan. I eventually worked with him [*on the Moulin Rouge! soundtrack*] and then towards the end of his life, he became a very good friend. He used to come round and we'd walk the dogs. We were talking about going to Berlin at one point to do something together. I must have been so stupid, why didn't I just say yes?

The song I can no longer listen to
PRINCE – SIGN O' THE TIMES
"It's a great song, but when I was younger I used it in a show that was an absolute catastrophe. Every time I hear it now, it takes me back to that."

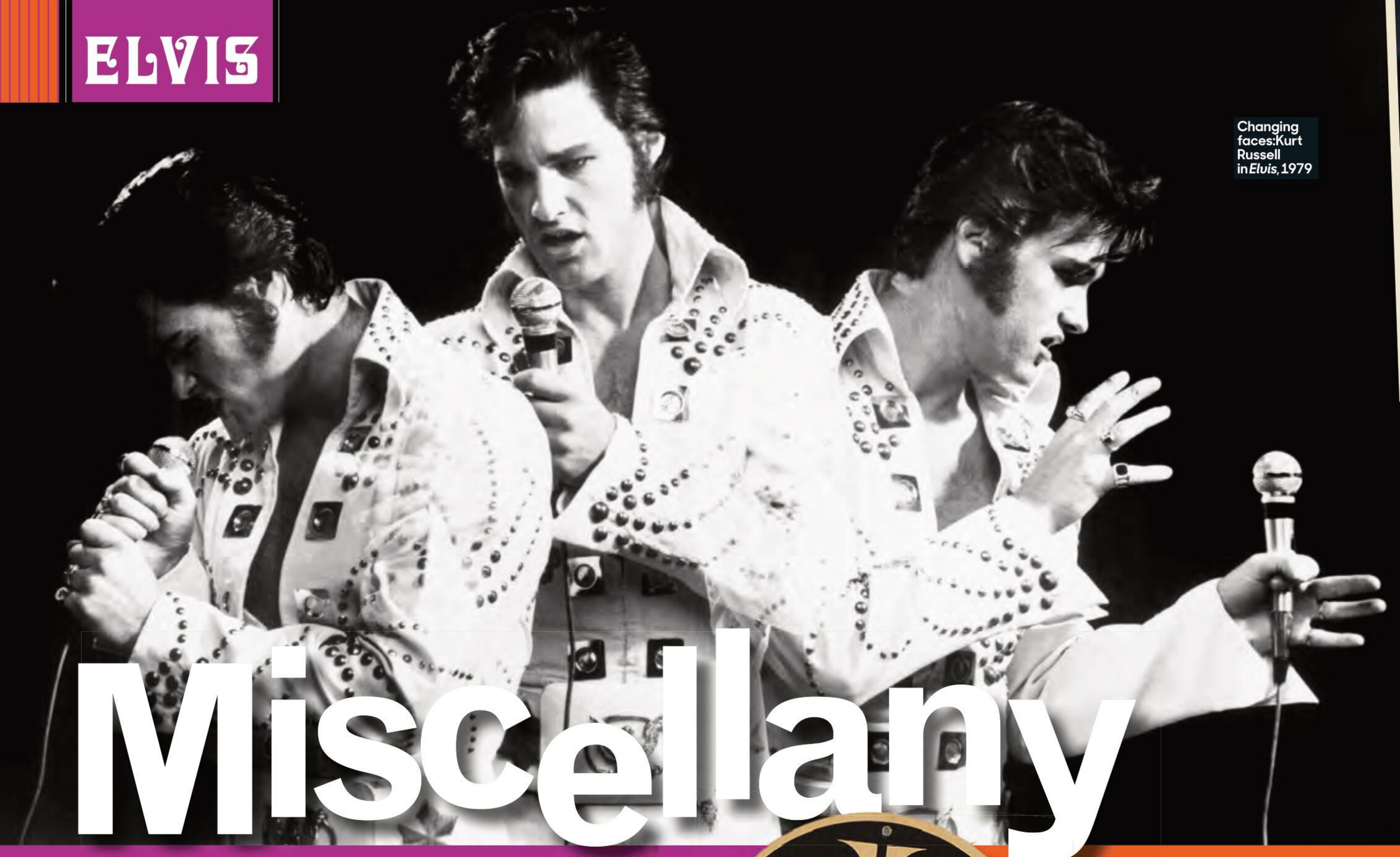
The song that reminds me of home
JOHN FARNHAM – YOU'RE THE VOICE
"I still go clubbing because I intend to grow old disgracefully: it's kind of my motto. I was in a nightclub recently and all the kids were singing along to this."

The first gig I went to
THE POLICE – SYDNEY, 1980
"I thought: 'Wow, this is what it means to see a live show!' It was just fantastic. Some years later I saw Sting at his birthday party and I told him it was the first show I'd ever been to."

The song I can't get out of my head
DOJA CAT – VEGAS
"She made this song for the *Elvis* soundtrack and it's already blowing up. I've worked with Madonna and Beyoncé and I see something similar in Doja Cat: she's just a really, really hard worker. And when you see her on stage, my god she's a good dancer."

The song that makes me want to dance
MADONNA – LIKE A VIRGIN
"Like Marlene, nothing will stop her from being a provocative artist. I think the younger generation are rediscovering her."

DAVID M. BENETT/DAVE BENETT/GETTY IMAGES FOR WARNER BROTHERS



Changing faces: Kurt Russell in *Elvis*, 1979

Miscellany

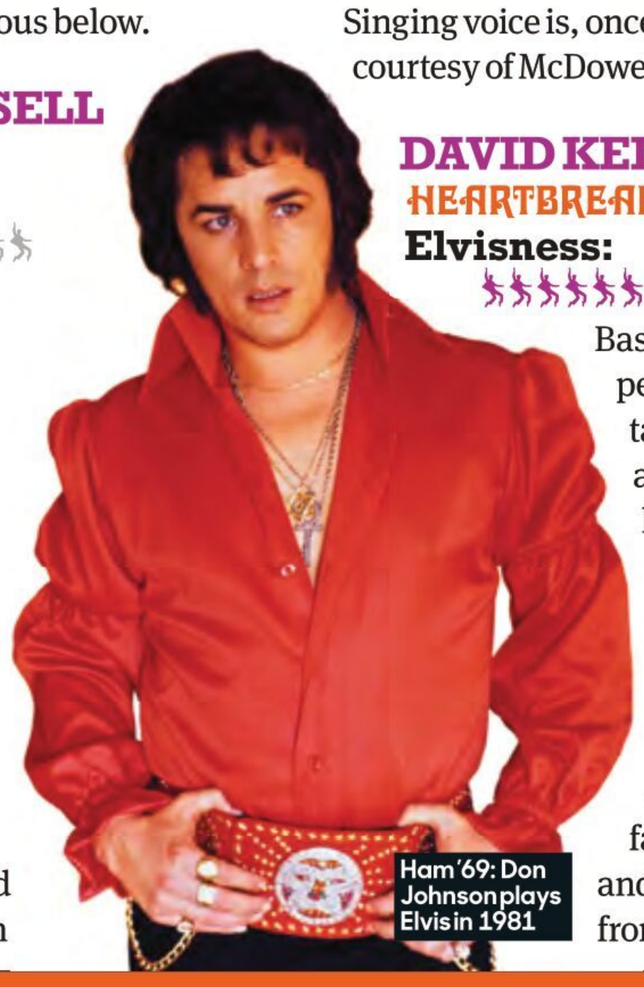
THE KING AND I

...Portraying Elvis on screen

ROCK 'N'ROLL icon, drug-addled paramour, wannabe G-man, slurring karate instructor, and septuagenarian ghost buster – Elvis Presley has been all these and more on screen. The life and times of The King have inspired filmmakers to put their own spin on events, resulting in an intriguingly broad range of portrayals. We've cherry-picked the most significant, playful and curious below.

KURT RUSSELL
ELVIS 1979
Elvisness:

Director John Carpenter's TV movie, shown theatrically in Europe, earned Russell a Golden Globe nomination for his nuanced, reflective performance. The narrative ends in 1970, and vocals to a dozen or so Presley tracks are by country singer Ronnie McDowell.



Ham '69: Don Johnson plays Elvis in 1981

DON JOHNSON
ELVIS AND THE BEAUTY QUEEN 1981
Elvisness:

Another TV movie, chronicling Presley's post-Priscilla, often tempestuous five-year romance with model and actress Linda Thompson ("The drugs are killin' him!"), with Johnson's over-the-top mannerisms the stuff of daytime soap or comedy caricature. Singing voice is, once again, courtesy of McDowell.

DAVID KEITH
HEARTBREAK HOTEL 1988
Elvisness:

Based on a persistent 1972 tabloid rumour, a teenage boy kidnaps Elvis as a gift for his diehard fan mother – cue heartfelt exchanges examining family values and redemption from a life of decadence. Hokey stuff, for sure, but David brings an affecting vulnerability to a rock god detached from the real world.

> KILMER'S FACE IS BARELY SEEN, BUT HIS HIP SWIVELS AND "HEARTBREAK HOTEL" DRAWL ARE SPOT-ON

QUENTIN TARANTINO
THE GOLDEN GIRLS 1988
Elvisness:

A pre-fame gig as an extra in the enduring sitcom, one of nine Elvis impersonators mistakenly booked for a wedding ceremony. His spirited croon along to "Hawaiian Wedding Song" is undermined by awkward dance moves suggesting he's listening to something faster.

MICHAEL ST GERARD
GREAT BALLS OF FIRE! 1989
Elvisness:

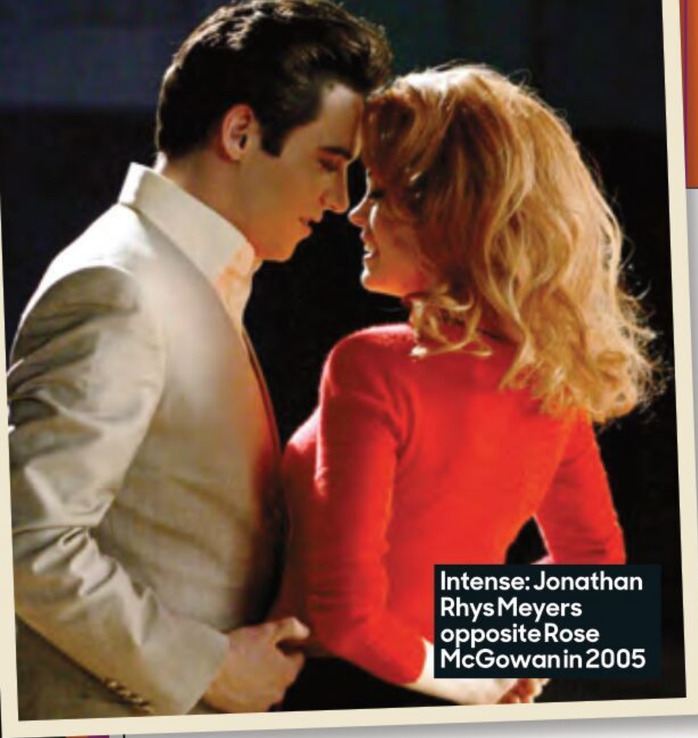
A brief dramatic scene in the colourful Jerry Lee Lewis biopic, in which The King, in full army uniform and bound for Germany, metaphorically passes his crown to Dennis Quaid's Killer. "It's all yours now," he says, tearfully. St Gerard went on to play Elvis in four more productions.

VAL KILMER
TRUE ROMANCE 1993
Elvisness:

Christian Slater's lovestruck pop culture geek calls upon an apparition of Elvis in times of trouble before skirmishes with ruthless villains. Kilmer's face is barely seen, but his gold lamé jacket, hip swivels and "Heartbreak Hotel" drawl are spot-on.

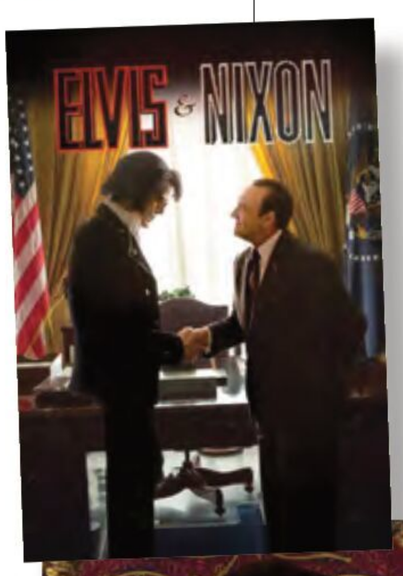
ROB YOUNGBLOOD
ELVIS AND THE COLONEL: THE UNTOLD STORY 1993
Elvisness:

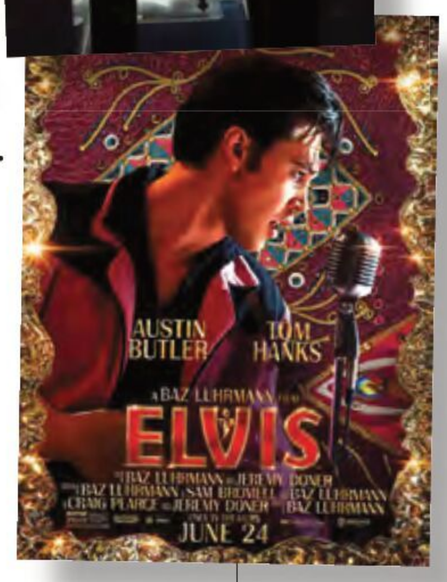
Bizarre morality tale in which, taking a leaf from Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*, Beau Bridges' Colonel Tom Parker is visited by the ghost of Elvis and forced to confront the errors of his ways. Youngblood's mumbled narration over a series of flashbacks is frequently difficult to decipher.


Intense: Jonathan Rhys Meyers opposite Rose McGowan in 2005

PETER DOBSON
FORREST GUMP 1994
Elvisness:
Fanciful rewriting of history, in which the 10-year-old Forrest's leg braces are revealed as the inspiration for Presley's dance moves. Dobson doesn't have much to do, but would have a meatier role as Elvis in the 2007 bodyguard drama *Protecting The King*.

DERMOT MORGAN, ARDAL O'HANLON, FRANK KELLY
FATHER TED 1995
Elvisness:
Craggy Island's trio of misfits triumph in the much-loved sitcom's All Priests Lookalike Contest, their presentation of the three ages of Elvis soundly beating Father Dick Byrne's Supremes. Kelly's Father Jack impressses as the Vegas years' barely sentient booze hound.





HARVEY KEITEL
FINDING GRACELAND 1998
Elvisness:
Farm boy Johnathon Schaech picks up a hitchhiker claiming to be Elvis, 20 years after faking his own death, but is he the real deal, or a drifter with mental health issues? Keitel cuts a convincing figure, his casting approved by co-producer Priscilla Presley.

BRUCE CAMPBELL
BUBBA HO-TEP 2002
Elvisness:
Another faked-death yarn, a comedy horror in which Campbell's now elderly and cranky Elvis and his care home buddy, a black man claiming to be JFK, do battle with a mysterious ancient Egyptian entity stealing the souls of the famous. Oh yes.

JONATHAN RHYS MEYERS
ELVIS (2005)
Elvisness:
The Irish actor earned Golden Globe and Emmy nods for his intense portrayal in this solid TV mini-series. The historical accuracy is shaky, but the depiction of Elvis's Faustian pact with the manipulative Colonel Tom (Randy Quaid) is gripping.

JACK WHITE
WALK HARD: THE DEWEY COX STORY 2007
Elvisness:
White's arrogant, borderline incomprehensible Elvis gives John C Reilly's greenhorn rock'n'roll wannabe career advice and an impromptu karate lesson: "Only two kinds of people know that stuff, man: the Chinese and The King... and one of 'em is me."

MICHAEL SHANNON
ELVIS & NIXON 2016
Elvisness:
Presley's infamous 1970 visit to Kevin Spacey's presidential White House is played for subtle laughs, with Shannon bringing both charisma and pathos to his portrayal of a jaded rock'n'roll icon seeking a role in Nixon's administration as an undercover drugs agent.

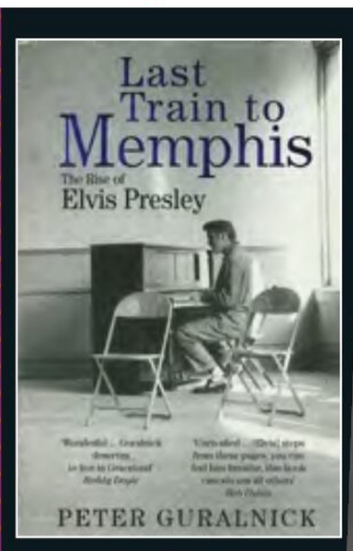
AUSTIN BUTLER
ELVIS 2022
Elvisness:
The carnival kitsch of director Baz Luhrmann's big budget biopic suits a narrative largely told from the point of view of Tom Hanks' huckster/showman Colonel Tom, but it's the dramatic weight of Butler's steely performance that gives the film its centre.

Bruce Campbell in *Bubba Ho-Tep*

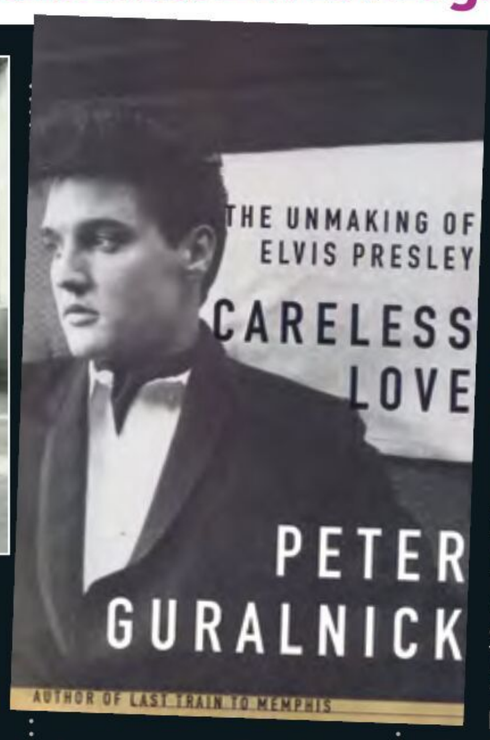
TERRY STAUNTON

WISE MEN SAY

Our pick of the best Elvis biographies



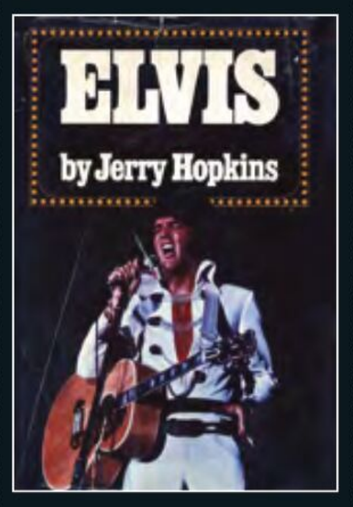
1 LAST TRAIN TO MEMPHIS/ CARELESS LOVE
Peter Guralnick 1994/99
Across two volumes and 1,300 pages, Guralnick trains a forensic microscope on every aspect of the singer's upbringing, subsequent stardom and the almost inevitable tarnishing of a myth. Part socio-cultural history, part post-mortem on the nature of celebrity, it never loses sight of music that altered the grammar of popular song.

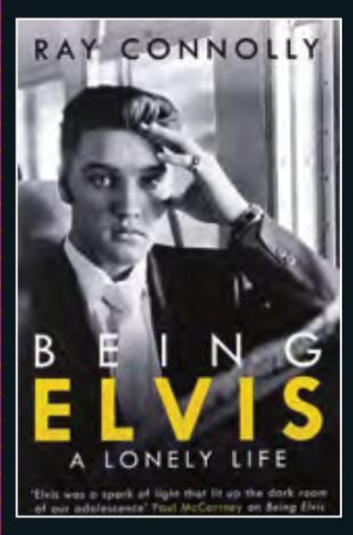


the fervour of his electrifying arrival on a world stage.

4 ME AND A GUY NAMED ELVIS
Jerry Schilling 2006
A key figure in the "Memphis mafia" entourage, Schilling was just 12 when he first met Presley, and the bond between the men lasted until the singer's death. Consequently, this a is hugely intimate tome, laced with colourful anecdotes of hanging out with The Beatles and movie stars, and impressions of a rock star at ease away from the spotlight.

hangs over the singer even in moments of triumph, leaving him ill-equipped to savour the good times.



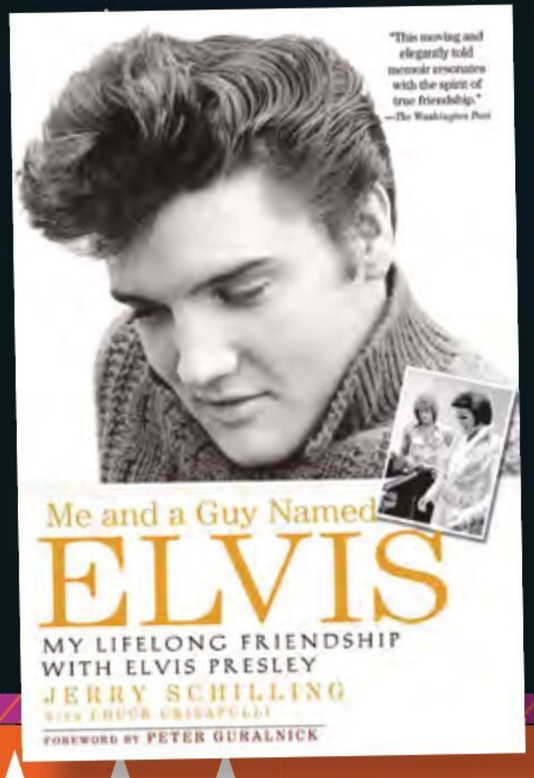


2 BEING ELVIS: A LONELY LIFE
Ray Connolly 2016
British journalist Connolly's portrait of the pitfalls of fame is an often heartbreaking read, with Elvis, even in the company of friends and fellow superstars like Bob Dylan or Johnny Cash, feeling isolated and insecure. The spectre that it could all end tomorrow

3 ELVIS: THE BIOGRAPHY
Jerry Hopkins 1971
The first serious study of Presley as an icon, published in the wake of the creative rebirth of the celebrated Comeback Special. American newspaper man Hopkins' breezy, conversational narrative evocatively captures both the singer's struggling hand-to-mouth southern roots and

5 DEAD ELVIS: A CHRONICLE OF A CULTURAL OBSESSION
Greil Marcus 1991
Presley featured heavily in *Rolling Stone* stalwart Marcus's seminal 1975 work *Mystery Train*, and here he revisits the symbolism and iconography of The King to examine its posthumous impact on American culture. A lively, thought-provoking study of how, and why, myths endure.

TERRY STAUNTON



TCD/PROD.DB / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO; EVERETT COLLECTION INC / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

1992: Presley's platinum and gold records on a wall at Graceland

KING'S RANSOM

Mark Bentley on the 78rpm Comeback Special

WHERE do you even start with collecting Elvis records? With eight decades worth of releases, and millions of copies sold across pretty much every territory in the world, it's a paralysing back catalogue.

Singles seem as good a place as any, and it is of course the early Sun label issues that are among the most famous collectable from any artist, ever. Possessing huge cultural significance – the single was the medium through which young America first connected with The King – any Sun 45 carries a premium. A complete set of those first five salvos, from Sun #209 (**"That's All Right"**) to Sun #223 (**"Mystery Train"**) have sold for over $30,000 – in lip-curlingly mint condition.

That set is the grail, and they don't come up often. Individually, Sun singles still worth big money: a beautiful copy of **"Milkcow Blues Boogie"/"You're A Heartbreaker"** (Sun #215) sold in late 2021 for £875. Don't forget that for some early enthusiasts, the shellac 78 rpm single was the format of choice. Rare as hell, a 78 of **"That's All Right"** sold for over £2,220, also in 2021.

We didn't get Sun in the UK of course, but we did get him on the **His Master's Voice** label. The UK 78 rpm releases hold antediluvian beauty, but aren't typically huge money. You can pick up **"Hound Dog"/"Don't Be Cruel"** on shellac for around a tenner, which seems criminally cheap. But as the format was phased out, these became rarer, and the last-ever Elvis 78 in the UK is a big-ticket collectable. That's 1960's **"A Mess Of Blues"**, which sold for £1,200 in autumn 2022.

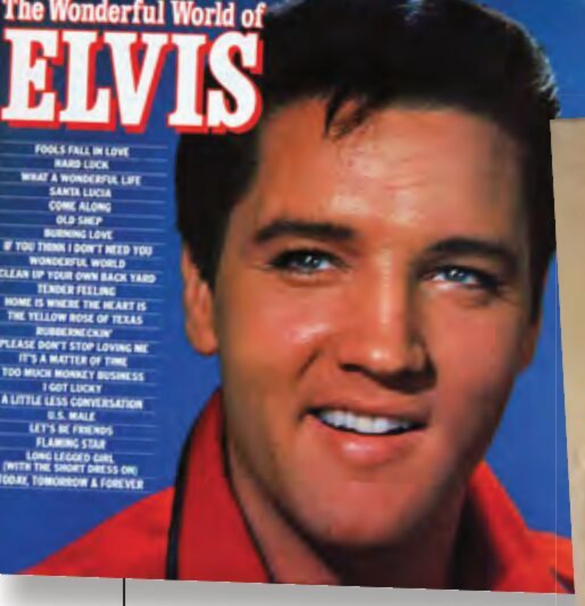
Details matter. For UK 45rpm singles, you're typically looking for earlier HMV issues with purple/gold print (like say "Heartbreak Hotel", which can fetch £100+), rather than the purple/silver print versions. (1957's **"Paralyzed"** can be yours for less than £20, it seems.) Those darling EPs – with their amazing picture sleeves – can be total bargains. 1958's **"In A Tender Mood"**, for example – with laminated front and back sleeves – is yours for just a few quid. When it comes to the albums, Elvis's key text is surely 1956's first UK HMV pressing of the debut. Finding one in great condition is tough. Some sellers are asking £500+ for the best-condition copies. We can see there's one advertised as "fair" right now, up for £250.

You're probably getting the sense that earlier is better. But some of the rarest album collectables come from later periods. 1977's **Moody Blue** you see a lot, but not on purple splash vinyl – which would make it worth $5,000 plus. Sure, it's easy to find 1973's **Aloha From Hawaii By Satellite**. But if you get one with a promotional sticker for Van Camp's Chicken of the Sea tuna (one of the event sponsors), then you're looking at $6,000 item.

Much of Elvis on vinyl is record-fair fodder. Amid the sea of £10 RCA LPs and cheapo

YOU CAN PICK "HOUND DOG" UP ON SHELLAC FOR AROUND A TENNER

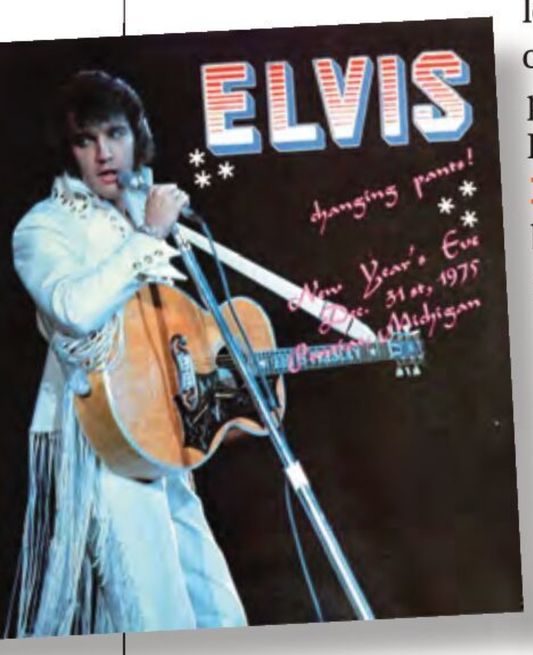
MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES;BROOKSKRAFT LLC/CORBIS VIA GETTY IMAGES



King seated: Elvis announces the planned satellite-broadcast Hawaii show, Las Vegas, September 1972

retrospectives, some collectables are easy to miss. Not in the big leagues, but the 1978 St Michael label (aka Marks & Spencer exclusive) 2LP issue of **The Wonderful World Of Elvis Presley** is worth a lot more than its awful artwork suggests; £25 or so. Meanwhile, 1983 CD boxset **The Legend** might look like something you'd find at a petrol station, but it's a very early authenticated digitised issue, and limited to 5,000 copies. That makes it a £250+ item.

Finally, to bootlegs and 'lost' Elvis. There are literally thousands of unofficial Elvis releases, but for our money the most interesting boots focus on celebrated shows. Example A would be **Changing Pants!** (New Year's Eve 1975, Pontiac, Michigan) – a record so illegal that reputable sites like Discogs.com won't let it through the doors. So called because The King rips his trousers during "I Got A Woman" and leaves the stage to change; punters will pay £50+ for the 1985 European issue. **The Last Farewell** may be the most (in) famous boot of all, documenting the show at Indianapolis Market Square Arena on June 26, 1977, mere weeks before his death. Depending on the issue, expect to pay $40 for the original US 2LP version.



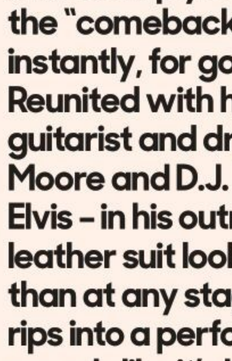
Established in 1999, the Follow That Dream label specialises in bringing lost Elvis content to the fans via official channels, and some of their excellent releases have assumed gotta-have status quite quickly. Keep an eye out for live releases like the $60 CD **Closing Night** (from the Las Vegas Hilton in '73), or the brilliant **The Jungle Room Sessions**, outtakes from '76 when a desperate RCA set up a mobile studio at Graceland. The CD is £40 or so, but the 2009 vinyl issue makes £300+, with one seller pitching a still-sealed version for €770 as we speak...

THAT'S THE WAY IT WAS

Elvis live shows/docs on DVD

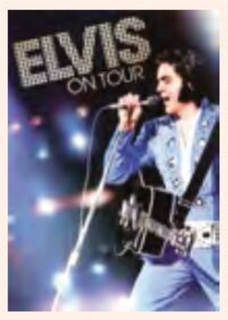
ELVIS: '68 COMEBACK (1968)

This is almost all you need. Going in, the original plan, as dictated by Col Tom, was for a Christmas special for NBC TV, Elvis singing nothing but Yuletide favourites. Give thanks producer Bob Finkell and director Steve Binder persevered to capture what we got instead. Shot in eye-melting colour, with emphasis on red and black, it was simply called Elvis, but the "comeback" tag stuck instantly, for good reason. Reunited with his original guitarist and drummer, Scotty Moore and D.J. Fontana, Elvis – in his outrageous black leather suit looking better than at any stage of his life – rips into a performance that sounds like it's been waiting 10 years to break free. Sweating and shook up, it's as if both he and the audience suddenly remember why he became Elvis in the first place. "If I Can Dream," written and performed in the aftermath of the assassinations of Martin Luther King and Bobby Kennedy, comes straight from the soul.



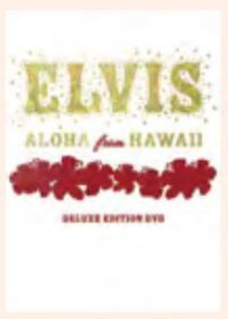
ELVIS: THAT'S THE WAY IT IS (1970)

The dawn of the jumpsuit. Documenting Elvis's return to live performance, this captures him during the best of his Vegas years, with damn-near definitive assaults on "Polk Salad Annie" and "Suspicious Minds," and Cary Grant in the audience. Director Dennis Sanders' original version mixes concert sequences with some brilliant rehearsals and not so necessary interviews with breathless fans. In 2001, filmmaker Rick Schmidlin returned to the footage, removed all the fan stuff and inserted unseen sequences for a re-edit that focuses squarely on Elvis in rehearsal and onstage – and that's the way it should be.



ELVIS ON TOUR (1972)

Showing Elvis in full command, but with decadence gathering fast, this account of the 15-city campaign that steamrolled over the US that spring 1972 was probably the best Elvis movie released to cinemas during his life, with a young Martin Scorsese editing the split-screen montage. Led by James Burton's peerless guitar, the killer band can conjure up a soul-fried sound reminiscent of 1969's majestic *From Memphis* LP, although orchestra and backing singers can overdose on saccharine, and Elvis is growing content to sometimes joke songs.



ALOHA FROM HAWAII (1972)

Col Tom cooked up the most ambitious TV special the world had ever seen – transmitted live by satellite across large sections of the globe on January 14, 1973, with a delayed broadcast in America and Europe shortly after. Historians have debated the Colonel's claim that 1.5 billion people watched, but it sure feels like it. In the middle of it all in his American Eagle jumpsuit and cape, Elvis seems disconnected at times, but, whipped along by crazed editing, there's a feverish air of insanity around the whole thing that makes it a must-see time capsule.

ELVIS IN CONCERT (1977)

While all the above are readily available on DVD and Blu-Ray, Elvis's final TV special, shot during his final tour in June 1977, and broadcast that October, two months after his death, remains out of reach beyond bootlegs. It has never been released on any home video format; speculation is the estate keeps it supressed because it caught the singer in such shockingly poor shape, pale and bloated, mumbling and sweating. The CBS network was so dismayed they initially considered shelving it, in the hope of recording a better performance later. Baz Luhrmann drew on it for his *Elvis* movie; more exciting, however, are rumours that Luhrmann is viewing hours of unseen footage from *Elvis On Tour* and *That's The Way It Is* with a view to creating redux editions.

DAMIEN LOVE

STOP ME

If you've heard this one before

"It took you Brits to do it…" In 2005 *NME* legend ROY CARR [1945-2018] recounted his role in compiling a million-selling Elvis album — and how Sam Phillips called him up to say thanks

AT the turn of the '70s it came to a head. For years and years I had been bugged by the knowledge that the seminal masterpieces that came from Elvis's Sun sessions had never been properly anthologised. Remarkably, his original Sun singles had remained just that, singles. The recordings that Elvis made at Sun between July 1954 and November 1955 are some of the most important recordings in modern music, but no-one was caring for them. Up until his death in 1977, Elvis's back-catalogue was treated only as an afterthought. Only now has it been afforded the attention it deserves.

Back in 1973, yours truly and like-minded RCA employee Shaun Greenfield began trying to get the tapes released. The original intention was to obtain official access to RCA's Stateside tape vaults, but knowing just how vague the label could be when it came to anything other than greatest hits compilations, we came up with tape box numbers to some unreleased treasures to excite them.

We had access to 16 tracks already, but we were after bonus material: we wanted to use the studio outtakes and false starts similar to those that had made their way onto the Dutch-pressed bootleg *Good Rockin' Tonight* to make an entire double album (it would be 1997 before the nigh-on definitive 38-track 'Sunrise' collection, complete with live cuts and acetates from 1953, would finally be released). Alternatively we imagined a seven-inch single that coupled "Tennessee Saturday Night" (scheduled for release twice but withdrawn) with the original slow treatment of "Blue Moon Of Kentucky". In addition we had recording sheets for "Oakie Boogie" and "Uncle Pen". RCA said none of them existed.

Whatever the eventual tracklisting, the album would come in a gatefold sleeve featuring period press adverts, concert posters and previously unseen photos. I would also pen the liner notes. I wanted an evocative sepia shot of a young Elvis stood backstage laughing with his hand-tooled guitar on the cover.

However, our enthusiasm was to be short-lived – the Americans promptly rejected the whole idea. As a result, *The Sun Collection* gathered dust for almost two years until, out of the blue, we received a Stateside memo from RCA giving us the green light to compile the 16-track single album. No reason was proffered for this U-turn. Likewise, there was to be no double album, no bonus EP, not even the gatefold sleeve! The sepia photo was also jettisoned to be replaced by a crude illustration of Elvis. So, two years after its inception, *The Sun Collection* was used to launch RCA's Starcall budget line in August 1975. That should have been the end of it, but it wasn't. The initial run only had an advertisement for other albums in the Starcall series printed on the rear sleeve; there was no sign of my liner notes or discography. This was corrected, inevitably, somewhat slowly.

> "UP UNTIL HIS DEATH, HIS BACK CATALOGUE WAS TREATED AS AN AFTERTHOUGHT"
> *Roy Carr*

UP until the release of this album, we were more or less relying upon received wisdom to put together the details of the discography. Soon after the album's belated release Stateside the following March (with an even worse illustrated cover), my phone rang at *NME*. It was Sam Phillips calling from Memphis. I held my breath for what seemed like an eternity; the man who'd first captured the spirit of Elvis on tape was bound to knock this young upstart from London.

"I just want to tell you," he began, "how much I've been enjoying the album you put together. It's about time someone did it. The people over here at RCA have got no idea of the historic importance of those records I made with Elvis. They haven't treated those records properly. It had to take you Brits to do it for them, but then Elvis's European fans have always had their priorities right." Over the next hour or more, Phillips answered all my questions, discussed the methods he used to record Elvis and revealed, for the first time it wasn't DJ Fontana that drummed on a handful of tracks but Johnny Bonnero – sticksman with The Dean Beard Band.

Armed with these revelations, I re-approached RCA and said that I wished to correct and revise both the sleevenotes and discography for the upcoming re-pressing. My offer was ignored. Likewise, when the album made its first appearance on CD. Meanwhile, *The Sun Collection* sold over a million and Sam Phillips continued to call me over the next couple of years. "You do know it's been one of Elvis's biggest sellers in ages," he told me one day. "It has put his early years into perspective." He went on to tell me how he had read an article written by Patti Smith's guitarist Lenny Kaye that said that many American universities had thought of offering me a degree for the project! He signed off by asking, "Well, I hope that RCA has at least given you a gold disc?" Twenty years after its release, I'm still waiting.

Original Sun session sheets for Elvis recordings in 1954

Roy Carr 2005

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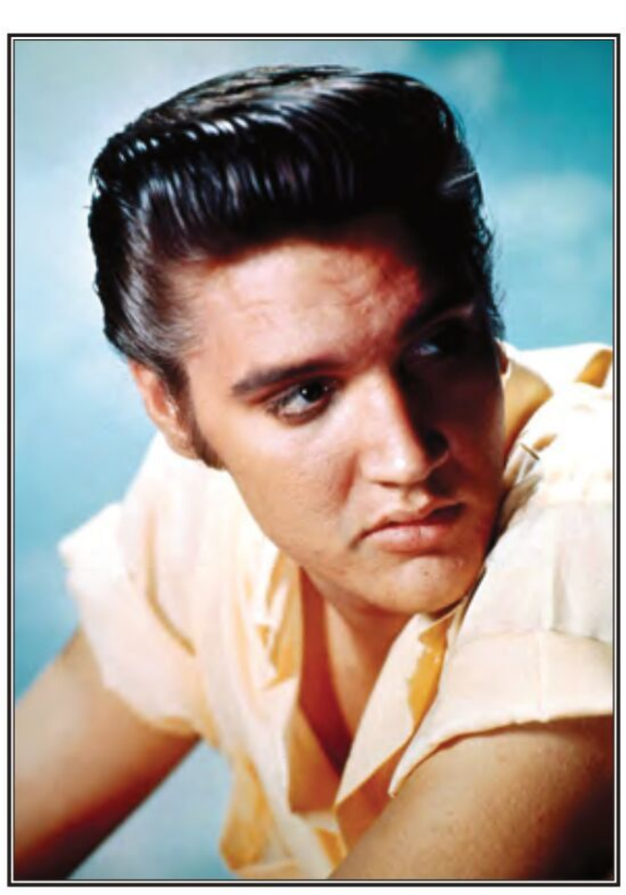

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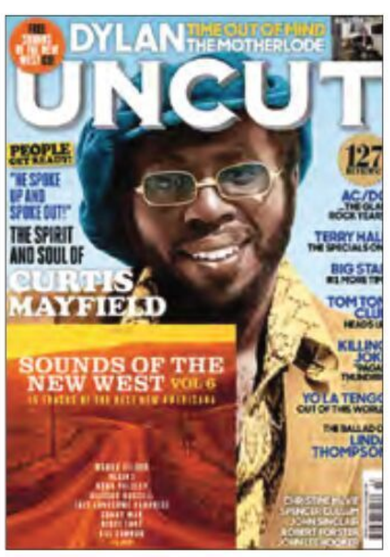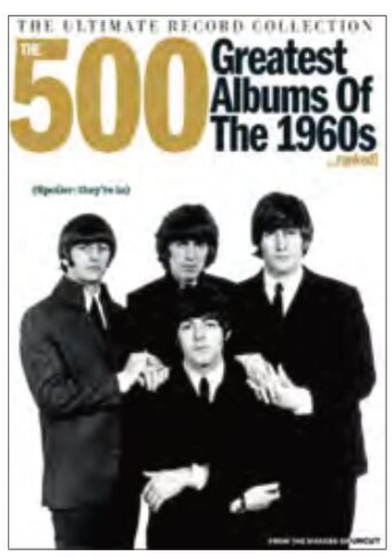
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